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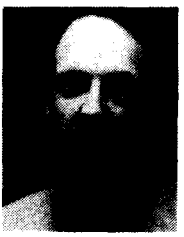

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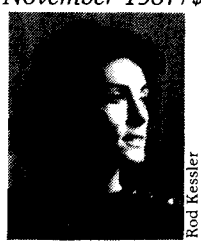

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VOLUME XL NUMBER 3 AUTUMN 1987

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TO OUR READERS

We regret that due to a printer's error the word "roads" was dropped from the first line of A.R. Ammons's poem "Fall's End," which appeared in the Summer 1987 issue. The first stanza should read:

Glassy rain on the roads
and day melting down:

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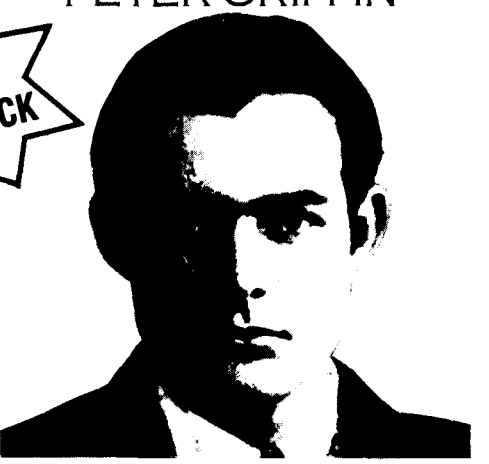

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Letter from Kobe

DEAR H,

It is just after *O Shogatsu*, Japan's biggest religious holiday that marks the opening of the New Year. For the first three days of the year practically everything in the country shuts down, and most people spend time with their families, either staying in or making pilgrimages to one or more shrines. Prior to the holiday, housewives are busy cleaning their homes from top to bottom—an equivalent of "spring cleaning" in the West—and preparing the elaborate and dainty dishes called *O sechi-ryori* that will be aesthetically arranged according to color and manner of preparation (sweet things, grilled things, simmered things, sour things) in the traditional triple- or quadruple-decker lacquer box, to be eaten during the first three days.

The customary pastime on New Year's Eve is not a drunken party but a quiet evening at home, watching a lengthy popular music show on TV. At midnight all over Japan temple bells begin to sound. Small bonfires burn in the courtyards as people step up to take a turn sending a deep gong-like ripple across the night air, one hundred and eight times for good luck. After that, the first bowl of *soba* of the new year is eaten, and many people stay up the whole night to see the sunrise.

On January 1 in the early afternoon I went with friends to two of the biggest shrines in the city of Kobe, Ikuta and Minatagawa. The crowds were enormous, because the "first visit" is extremely significant. Though not as many as in former days, quite a few women were dressed in the long-sleeved kimono called *furisode*, somewhat incongruously topped by white feather or fur boas against the chilly air. The shrines in Japan are Shinto, while the temples are Buddhist, but the two seem to exist symbiotically. Observing the Shinto rituals of the New Year by no means excludes participation in Buddhist rites, or even in Christian observances. There is no religious "service" on New Year's Day; the mass of humanity presses forward toward the large wooden offertory box that stands in front of the shrine. After a clap of the hands and a momentary prayer, the rest of the time is free for picture-taking with the family, buying amulets and paper fortunes, or writing your hopes and dreams for the coming year on a wooden plaque and affixing it to a sort of bulletin "wish" board. The paper fortunes are also left behind, tied to trees and bushes.

Food and trinket stalls line the walkways up to the shrines and do a brisk business. I tasted *tai-yaki*, a waffle-like creation shaped like a fish and filled with the sweet red azuki bean paste that is used in so many Japanese confections. Under the green leaves of the camphor

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Frederick Morgan

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trees at Minatagawa Jinja we welcomed in the Year of the Rabbit, the sixty-second year of the Showa Empire.

It is my second year in Japan. When I first arrived, shaken by the upheaval of leaving everything familiar behind, I thought I had made a terrible mistake. I landed at Narita airport, outside of Tokyo, and took the connecting shuttle to Osaka the next morning, where I was met by two professors from the women's university where I was going to teach. My first real look at things was from the window of the taxi that we took from Osaka to Kobe. What met my eyes was a steady, unrelieved, colorless jumble of concrete. It was my first exposure to one aspect of Japan's crowdedness, and also to the widespread lack of concern for city planning in any spatial or architectural sense, an absence that seems more than a little odd in a culture whose sense of beauty is so highly refined.

Statistically, Japan is 1/25th the size of the United States and has about half as many inhabitants. The fact that seventy percent of the terrain is mountainous, however, cuts down the living space considerably. Not surprisingly, the care and housing of the country's aging population is a problem that is beginning to reach critical proportions. Relocating the retired and elderly to other countries (the U.S., Australia, Brazil) is a plan that has already begun to be implemented.

Outside of Tokyo, which is in Kanto, the Kansai area where Kobe, Osaka, and Kyoto are located is the most densely populated and also the most affluent. Kobe is the second largest port in Japan, after Yokohama, and is known as a cosmopolitan city because of its mixed population, but I soon learned that of the nearly million and a half residents only slightly more than 38,000 were non-Japanese. Of these, nearly 28,000 are Korean, with Chinese (7,331) and Indians (960) next in line. Europeans and Americans number only in the hundreds and are scarcely visible in the populace at large, albeit more so in Kobe than in most places.

Kobe was seriously bombed in World War II and has been rebuilt into a prosperous industrial city. It is long and narrow, bordered on one side by the Rokko Mountains and on the other by the Inland Sea, and these geographical constraints put a limit on urban sprawl, at least north to south. It is considered a nice place to live partly because the climate on the southern coast of the island of Honshu is temperate, while the northern coast (called the Japan Seacoast), the mountain range known as the Japan Alps, and the northernmost island of Hokkaido are subject to extreme cold and heavy snow in winter. Although the temperature drops below freezing in Kobe in the coldest months (December–February) and the wind can be biting, rose, pink, and white camellias continue to bloom, and most houseplants can be left outside. Kyoto is less favorably disposed in terms of climate, being situated in a bowl that traps cold air in win-

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ter and hot air in summer. Kobe swelters in summer as well; June is the rainy season, and in July and August the heat and humidity are exceedingly uncomfortable.

For the first week after my arrival I stayed with my friends Ann and Yoshio Tsuda and their two daughters in their beautiful apartment (actually two apartments combined into one) filled with their extraordinary collection of pottery from all over Japan. Behind the large "mansion," as apartment buildings are called here, there is a wooded ravine, somehow miraculously spared from development, through which a small stream runs. I will always remember those first mornings, waking up on my futon, which had been laid on the wheat-colored tatami mats in Ann's room, to the sound of rushing water. I should say waking up in the middle of the night, since I was suffering from jet lag and would nod off and awaken at all hours.

Soon enough I was shown the apartment that the university was providing for me. What a shock! It was on the ground floor of a six-story, block-long, concrete building in a *danchi*, or housing development, that consisted of thirty-eight identical buildings with large numbers on either end to differentiate them. Mine was number 4. When the people from my school had asked me if I wanted to live "Japanese style" I had said yes, my romantic mind full of graceful wooden structures with sliding doors, and verandas that gave out onto exquisite gardens (I learned later that such houses did indeed still exist, but at a price, of course). Instead I encountered the sort of housing that is a lifelong reality for millions of Japanese people, the "rabbit hutches" that are a source of national chagrin.

When the metal door of my apartment clanged shut behind me I felt locked in a tomb. Far more disconcerting than the apartment's lack of amenities, however, was the rest of the culture shock I was experiencing. Naively, I had thought I could transplant myself into a foreign culture—especially westernized, affluent Japan—without much trouble, but I found that I was ill-prepared emotionally for the feeling of being a *gaijin*, or "outsider," as the Japanese call those not their own. I had never been in the midst of a homogenous race before, let alone one as insular and proud as the Japanese. When I was first beginning to explore Kobe, it gave me a queer sensation to see the crowded buses and trains filled with such remarkably alike-looking people, who shared not only the physical attributes of hair, eye, and skin color, but also dressed and acted alike. A Dutch woman I became friends with remarked one day, "When I first got here I thought I had landed on another planet!"

In my immediate neighborhood I was surrounded by some 6,000 fellow *danchi* dwellers. I had not anticipated what it would be like to have no one take the slightest notice of my presence, except for an

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occasional stare. I was invisible. I had mistakenly thought that since English language study is a required part of the general school curriculum, beginning at grade seven and continuing at least through high school and often into college, I would be able to communicate with people, at least minimally, in English. This assumption was absolutely incorrect. I rued the fact that I had not found a way to study Japanese before I left home, because my current teaching schedule was not going to permit the kind of intensive study that learning Japanese requires.

As luck would have it, I only lived in the *danchi* for a little over four months. By then I was beginning to have a network of acquaintances, and when a small house in another neighborhood became available I jumped at the chance to move. The "little house," as I call it, is not the Japanese house of my dreams—it has not an inch of garden or grass, and nary a tree—but the improvement was spectacular nonetheless. The house sits near the top of a long sloping hill, close to the mountain. From my study on the second floor I look out across tiled rooftops all the way down to the harbor. Unfortunately, most days the view is obscured by the thick cloud of pollution that hangs over the port area, but when a brisk wind clears the air somewhat, or at night when the city lights are glittering, it is a pretty outlook. In fact, the "night view" of Kobe, either from the top of Mt. Rokko looking down the sea, or from Port Island (a manmade island in the harbor) looking at the city sloping upward, is one of the most celebrated in Japan.

Teaching English is what nearly every *gaijin* does for a living, with the exception of the international businessmen. Since the end of the war English has been the foreign language of choice, and there is an almost limitless demand for teachers, making Japan one of the most attractive places on earth for our expatriates. Every day the newspapers carry ads for "native English speakers" to fill the positions at language schools (one of the lowest paying jobs in the echelon), and every company worth its salt has instituted English classes for its workers. Jobs at colleges and universities are harder to come by, since hiring is done primarily on a who-you-know basis, but only recently have any real academic credentials begun to be required.

When I first faced classrooms full of eighteen- and nineteen-year-old Japanese girls I thought I might possibly be going to have a nervous breakdown. There seemed to be an almost schizophrenic dichotomy between the traditional reverence for the *sensei*, or teacher, and the students' actual behavior. Granted, many of them had never heard English coming out of the mouth of a native speaker and might have been expected to be cowed by the phenomenon, but that did not make it any less distressing. Any requests for discussion or questions on my part were met with stony silence, yet

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during the rest of the class an incessant chit-chat (in Japanese) made it nearly impossible to teach. I ricocheted between two equally upsetting thoughts: were the students bored because what was being taught was too easy and did not hold their interest?—or were they bored because it was too hard and they couldn't follow? It was impossible to tell, because no one would say a word.

It took me a full term to come to grips with the situation, if indeed I can claim to have done so. But now, after three terms, I've begun to break through the barriers of reticence and shyness, and I've even made friends with a few girls who are brave enough to approach me outside of class. Since more and more are going abroad for summer programs or homestays or a year of study, I like to think I can help them a little bit. Although in many respects Japanese girls are less inquisitive intellectually, less ambitious professionally, and less worldly than their American peers, they possess many endearing qualities. In the diaries that my writing classes keep as their homework I catch a glimpse of their concerns, and of their hopes and dreams. To their families and friends (high school and even junior high chums are never forgotten) they bear an intense loyalty and tender regard. And, despite the fact that they are all too aware of society's parameters for them as women, some are beginning to push against the cocoon a bit, wanting to venture into a less restricted world. As much as I want them to recognize and claim their equality with men and develop their abilities, I hope that they will be able to keep the gentleness, fidelity, and generosity that are so evident in their emotional makeup.

Last June I went to the third kabuki performance of my stay here. The first two were in Tokyo, at the Kabukiza, where I sat spellbound for hours on end, watching this most fantastic of theatrical genres. In June I went to Kyoto, an easy train ride from Kobe of only a little over an hour, to the Minamiza, to sit in a tatami box in the front of the third tier, facing straight onto the stage. The performance was *Yamato Takeru*, billed as "super kabuki," directed by and starring Ichikawa Ennosuke, with costumes built by the Issey Miyake studio at a cost of the equivalent of five million dollars.

In the realm of kabuki the forty-seven-year-old Ennosuke is a maverick who has dared to stretch the classical restrictions of the form, generating vociferous approval and disapproval for his experimental work. In *Yamato Takeru* Ennosuke creates a warrior hero of archetypal stature in a story drawn from Japan's ancient history-mythology, the *Kojiki*. Yamato is one of the old names for Japan, and Yamato Takeru is one of the eighty children of Emperor Keiko, who supposedly lived for a hundred and thirty-seven years. He undertakes a series of larger-than-life adventures, subduing all opponents, human and anthropomorphic, until at last he succumbs to a hailstorm directed at him by an evil mountain god.

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I have never witnessed anything to compare with Ennosuke's physical virtuosity and awareness of theatrical nuance. He is not a large man, yet throughout the four-hour-long performance the audience collectively held their breath while he was onstage whirling and striking, supplicating, making love. Finally he is laid to rest in his tomb. His wife and small child mourn him there, then leave the stage. Everything is still. Then the tomb begins to tremble, molten and glowing. After a long, heart-stopping minute the highest stones fall away. Yamato Takeru steps forth, transformed into a magnificent white bird with shimmering feathers. His chalk white face is expressionless, no longer subject to the play of passion. Very very slowly he begins to fly, through rainbow light, up over the heads of the audience. If I had put out my hand I could have touched him as he passed by.

ELIZABETH KNIES

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GARY KRIST

Health

1

The refrigerator in Ilona's studio contains a bag of carrots, a bottle of Smirnoff vodka (in the freezer compartment), and the manuscript of her Uncle Mike's unpublished book about racehorses. She heard somewhere that the contents of refrigerators can survive even the most destructive fires. That's why she keeps the manuscript in the fridge; it's the most valuable item in her studio, with the possible exception of her own paintings, which are too large to fit into a meat locker let alone a midget refrigerator. She takes the manuscript out sometimes and reads it, usually in the late afternoons when her creative juices reach ebb tide. That's when the vodka comes out, too. She drinks it straight, the way her Russian ex-boyfriend taught her, from a tiny blue-tinted shot glass. The carrots she eats for lunch.

Her studio is at the south end of an old wooden warehouse in Hackensack. The place is owned by an ex-Franciscan friar who inherited it from his mother. He has no business sense, according to Ilona, and is renting her the place for a hundred a month. She told me this one afternoon as she stared through the west windows at a red sun the size of a turkey platter. The east windows look across a field of weeds and cattails to the Hackensack River.

When my car is running, I'll take a ride out there after a day at the lab and pass the unproductive late-afternoon hours with her. Sometimes we make love on her paint-spattered divan. Other times we just sit around and drink vodka and listen to her Talking Heads albums—on Siamese headphones, so we won't disturb Katha, the epileptic pianist in the studio next door. At seven o'clock or so, if her creative juices start racing back like the tide at Mont-Saint-Michel, she gives me a marked-up delivery menu to drop off at Fong's Panda House

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and kicks me out. If not, we drive—my white Impala following her white Lincoln Continental—back to her house in Englewood Cliffs, where we make elaborate three-course dinners that we linger over until midnight. Then we go to sleep and have monstrous nightmares together.

She inherited the house from her parents, who died several years ago. As the only child, she also got the car and enough money to keep her in paint, paper, and studio space for the rest of her life. Ilona dedicated one of her earliest series of paintings to their memory. I've seen them; a jagged flame motif runs through all of the canvases. She keeps the series in a corner of the studio, covered with a grimy sheet of oilcloth.

She calls herself a "semi-representational expressionist" or a "mud painter," depending on her mood and the person she's talking to. She adds dirt from the banks of the Hackensack to her pigments, and she smears them on paper or canvas with the heels of her hands. Her fingernails never come entirely clean, so she paints them with blue nail polish. Sometimes I can taste grit in the lettuce she tears for our salads.

She's tall and incredibly thin—her pelvis shows through the skin like a skeleton's—and her nose is a little bulbous and always on the brink of bleeding. She has thick, reddish hair that's usually heaped messily on top of her head and held in place with handfuls of bobby pins, which she sheds at every turn the way cats shed fur.

She's got a quiet, slightly hoarse voice that makes her sound like she's always coming off a cold. But she doesn't get colds, or even sore throats.

Sometimes she does pushups in her studio. Once, a couple years before she met me, she punched a guy in a bar and dislocated his septum. When he started bleeding, she gave him her jacket to hold against his swelling nostrils. Then she drove him to the emergency room at Englewood Hospital. My kind of girl.

2

It all started, really, five months before I met Ilona, when my parents decided to leave home. "We'll be flying down in January, after the holidays," my mother told me one evening

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as she unwrapped a frozen leg of lamb. I remember the meat smoking in her hands like something on fire. "Dad and I think you should stay here as long as you like," she went on. "When you want to move, tell us and we'll tell the realtor to sell. Meantime, you've got the place to yourself."

They were moving to Florida, to a place just outside of Jacksonville. My sister Annette had moved there three years earlier; Annette and her husband lived in a twelve-room hacienda-style house three hundred yards from the beach. "Florida!" I had nearly shouted when Annette first told me she was going. "I thought only old people moved to Florida."

And now my parents—old people—were following her south. For their health, they said. My father was diabetic and my mother had had two mild heart attacks. "The warm winters will be better for your mother's heart," my father told me that evening, after we finished the leg of lamb. He was staring down at the dirty nails on his thick, hairy hands as he spoke. He knew it was going to be difficult for me.

When January came, I took the afternoon off from the lab and drove them to the airport. On the way to the gate, we had to stop while my father tied his shoe. He did it slowly, carefully, almost as if he had to try hard to remember what his hands were supposed to do. My mother, meanwhile, smiled sadly and asked me whether I thought the girl behind the pretzel cart looked a little bit like Annette. "A bit," I said, though the girl must have been at least ten years younger than my sister. Later, when I hugged them goodbye, I was amazed at how frail their bodies felt—hollow, like papier-mâché figures with chicken wire for bones.

Then they were gone, and I was alone in the eight-room, split-level house that I had grown up in. It was the first time in my life I had lived alone; even as an undergraduate at Rutgers I had shared a room with two other guys. But now, the lights were always out when I came in at night. I could move the furniture around in the living room and nobody but me would know.

"Empty nest syndrome," I would joke to my friend Joyce at the lab. Maybe it really was. I found myself working later and later most evenings, clearing up unimportant paperwork until ten or eleven o'clock. Other nights I'd go home and drink

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rum-and-cokes. I'd sit in front of the TV and watch reruns of situation comedies deep into the night. Ha-ha, I'd say aloud at the screen, a few seconds after the laugh track had subsided. Sometimes I'd call up radio stations and request songs that I'd later forget to listen to.

Once, on a rainy Saturday night, I drank through an entire bottle of rum. At midnight, with the blue light of the television flickering around the walls, I climbed the three groaning, uncarpeted steps to my parents' old bedroom. I stepped up to the bed, turned back the ratty brown spread they had left on it, and looked at their pillows. They were flat, uncreased. I picked them up and crushed them to my face—first my father's, then my mother's. It was something I had done as a kid, when I was alone in the house, scared or lonely or just bored. Now, as then, the pillows held their scents, even though my parents hadn't slept on them for weeks. My father's smelled of sweat, camphor, and wintergreen (from the Ben-Gay he used on his forever-aching neck muscles); my mother's smelled of soap.

I inhaled deeply, letting the dusty aromas loosen the tightness that had wrapped itself around my shoulders. It's like a curtain of their smells, I said aloud. Downstairs, the voices on the television went on—murmurs addressed to a vast, empty room.

The next morning—a bright, innocuous Sunday morning—I telephoned my parents. "Go ahead and call the realtor," I told my mother. "I think it's time for me to leave."

3

I met Ilona that spring—at a pinochle game—on the night before my mother's bypass operation. By then I was living in my new place: a three-room basement apartment in a big brick house on a flat-topped hill. The house was surrounded by rhododendrons and dogwoods and begonias. From the end of the gravel driveway, I could see the roof of the old house, three blocks away.

My father had called in the afternoon. The special diet my mother was on, he said, was not really helping her; the cardiologist thought she might be in danger of another attack.

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"They say it's not an emergency, but that the sooner it gets done, the better. I'll tell you if you need to come down. Annette's here to look after me in the meantime." The operation was slated for the next morning, not (he quickly assured me) because it was rush-rush, but because someone had died before surgery and opened up a slot in the schedule. "The procedure's pretty routine, they tell us," my father said. "And Dr. Tucci says this bypass should, I repeat should, do the trick for her."

John Peebles, an acquaintance from Rutgers, had called about ten minutes later, just as my father's news was beginning to penetrate the layer of numbness that seemed to surround my body. John's usual fourth for pinochle was sick with the flu, could I maybe fill in? I remembered the red bumper sticker that hung over John's bed in his dorm room at school—PINOCHLE OBLITERATES THOUGHT, in black Gothic lettering. "I'll bring a six-pack of Bud," I found myself saying into the phone. "But you'll have to pick me up. My car's in the shop."

Ilona was one of the other players. John had introduced her as "Ilona Lee, *artiste* from Tennessee," though she had no discernible accent. Her fingers were stained black around her blue fingernails, and she threw down her trump cards the way medieval knights must have thrown down their gauntlets. She talked steadily through the game—about treacherous gallery owners, deadbeat clients, and a newspaper critic in Philadelphia who had called her work "tedious and primitive." Then, in the middle of a hand, she said something about her "parents' demise."

I felt a slight tightening of the muscles in my legs when she said this. Do parents have demises? I wondered. Was this the way you talked about your parents' death, once they were gone? I looked over at Ilona and tried to imagine what type of person would use an expression like "my parents' demise." "Your play," she said then, lifting her eyes to mine.

When the game broke up, I asked Ilona for a ride home. I guess I wanted to hear more about her parents, and besides, she was going more or less in my direction anyway. Eastward. She lived in Englewood Cliffs.

We sat side by side in the front seat of her white Lincoln.

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At first, we talked about the obvious things—my lab job, the other pinochle players, her studio—but our voices seemed absurdly small in the enormous, vinyl-smelling space of the car. There were long silences between our sentences. I watched the empty lanes of Route 80 speed past the windows, dreading the moment when I would have to get out of this car and enter my lightless basement. I knew that once I was alone in my own apartment, I wouldn't be able to stop myself from thinking about my mother in some high, white hospital bed, breathing faintly and wearing one of those plastic identification bracelets around her narrow wrist. Routine, I kept on saying to myself, it was only a routine procedure.

We had been silent for a few minutes when we passed the first sign announcing the exit for Fort Lee. That was when I asked about her parents' demise.

She seemed surprised that I had asked. "With most people I meet, that's probably the last thing they want to talk about," she said. "Sometimes I think they sit across from me and dread that I'll bring the subject up. You must be some kind of ghoul or something, eh?"

I told her about my own parents—that they were both very sick, that they had moved to a place a thousand miles away from me, that my mother was having open-heart surgery in eight hours.

"Oh," she said. "Sorry." She stared hard at the road for a few seconds. Then, finally: "My parents were killed in a fire, in a hotel in Lisbon three years ago, two days before my twenty-sixth birthday."

When I didn't answer, she turned to look at me and then went on. "It's fine, it's over now. I survived. This is their car, in fact. I inherited it. And the house, too, and enough money to quit my florist job and rent a studio in Hackensack. I still live in the house, but I spend most of my time in the studio. Painting is what I do now, all day and all night. I'm painting till I drop dead, hopefully at age 93." She let out a little mirthless laugh then, like a period at the end of her sentence.

"How did you feel," I asked her, "when it was happening? When you first heard about it?"

She shot me a worried sidelong glance. Then she answered: "Look, Roscoe, it doesn't pay to go into those things over and over again. Believe me, I know."

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"Sorry," I said, looking away and out the window again.

"Your mother will be fine, don't worry." Ilona speeded up and changed lanes. We sat quietly as the gargantuan Lincoln ate up another mile of dark, empty highway.

"Hey," she said then, keeping her eyes on the road. "You want to come home with me?"

It took me a moment to realize that she was serious. "Is that just to make me feel better?" I asked.

"I got the idea when you got into the car. It was supposed to make me feel better. If it's making you feel better too, so much the better, no?"

I hesitated before answering. "Can you drive me home by nine in the morning?" I asked.

"If she's going in at nine, they won't have any news to report until at least ten, but I'm driving you home by six if you want me to."

"Nine is fine," I said, wondering what my father would say if he knew I was spending this operation eve away from home. "I'll make pancakes in the morning if you want. I make good pancakes."

"I don't eat breakfast," she said, and those were the last words we spoke until we reached her house in Englewood Cliffs.

"Please don't tell me how nice the place is," Ilona said as she swept through the lavish, carpeted living room, turning on lights. "I had nothing to do with making it that way." She had said this before, I could tell—to other guests; it was another line like "my parents' demise."

I stepped down into the sunken living room and wandered among the maroon leather chairs, white marble tables, and black ceramic lamps. The place looked like something out of the magazines that Annette, with a certain amount of irony, fanned across her sideboards in the Jacksonville hacienda. Except that there were a few subtle dissonances. The gladiolas in the shiny black vase in the corner were dead and brittle; a glass bowl on the coffee table held a pair of lavender earmuffs; and there were floppy hats and multicolored wool scarves hanging from the frames of all the mirrors on the walls.

While Ilona lit the gas-fed log in the fireplace and opened

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up a bottle of wine, I stood in front of an illuminated oil painting of a man in a gray suit. "This your father?" I asked quietly.

"God, no. My father always wished he looked that good. That's my Uncle Mike, Mom's brother. Dearest man in the world, though a bit on the old fogey side. Here," she said, handing me a knife-thin, tulipped glass of wine. "White Zinfandel. Cheapest drinkable stuff in the store." Then she took off her noisy clogs and tucked her feet beneath her on the sofa.

"You grew up in this house?" I asked, settling on the sofa next to her.

"From age six on. We lived in Knoxville before that."

My wineglass tapped as I placed it on the marble coffee table.

"The money comes from my mother's side, if you're wondering," she went on. "Generations upon generations of lawyers. Beauregard is their name, can you believe it? Uncle Mike's got his own firm in Knoxville, when he's not out at his horse farm, that is. And see that mantel clock? Belonged to Andrew Carter Beauregard, attorney to the Confederate States."

"And this is how it looked when they lived here?" I asked.

"Oh, I've moved a few things. And the bedroom's entirely different. But I'm in the studio morning to night, so who needs to redecorate?"

I thought of the house I grew up in. It was now occupied by a Greek family who had repainted it a robin's egg blue.

"So what about your family?" she asked. "What kind of a name is Boghosian anyway?"

"Armenian," I said. "Both my parents were born there."

"I don't think I've ever met an Armenian before."

"Oh, we're around. We're just like Jews, only nobody knows about our Holocaust. The Turks don't even acknowledge that it happened."

Ilona shifted her weight on the sofa. "Ever think of visiting there yourself?" she asked.

"I did, three summers ago. I even started writing a travel article about it, but it turned into a long treatise on the 1915 massacres. My father read it and said he was proud of me for

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not forgetting my heritage. He wants me to turn it into a book, which I've actually considered doing."

"You should, you should," she said, being polite.

"I don't really have the energy for that kind of thing after a day of pithing frogs and making tissue cultures. Besides, I'd just be doing it for my parents' sake, and the way things are going," I said, thinking again of that plastic ID bracelet around my mother's wrist, "they'd probably be gone before I could ever get it done."

Ilona frowned and put down her wineglass. "You're a real depressing guy, Roscoe. This little tryst of ours was supposed to make us feel better."

"Oh, right," I said, staring into the crackle-less fire. "Party, party, party."

She leaned forward then and kissed me once on each eye.

We made love slowly, awkwardly, through a fine haze of fatigue and white Zinfandel. By this time, we had moved to the king-size bed in the master bedroom. I tried to forget the fact that this was not really Ilona's bedroom—at least it hadn't been until three years ago. The sheets smelled vaguely of men's cologne. Her father's?

When we had finished and lain together for a few minutes, Ilona sat up and popped her contact lenses into her cupped hand. "I feel better," she said as she snapped shut the lens case and turned out the lamp. "Do you?"

"I think I do," I said.

I turned away and she folded herself against the contour of my back, wrapping her arm around my solar plexus. "I'm glad," she said, her voice on my neck.

I lay with my eyes open until the objects in the bedroom became visible in the dim moonlight from the windows. Ilona's breathing was becoming regular against my back. "Ilona?" I whispered.

It took her a moment to realize that I had spoken. "I was asleep," she said.

"I usually can't fall asleep without the radio. Do you mind if I turn it on?"

"Anything you want," she said.

I reached over and adjusted the clock-radio until I found WINS-AM, the all-news station.

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"This is what you sleep to?" she asked after a moment.

"The stories start to repeat after twenty minutes or so. The monotony lulls me." I wedged myself harder against her and yawned. "Good night."

"Yes," she said. She heaved a big sigh, ruffling the hair at the back of my head with her breath. Then she lay still, pretending to be asleep, but her breathing didn't become deep and regular for over a half-hour—not until after the four o'clock news roundup, the weather bulletin, and a short, despondent plea to take hold of life and attend a school for tractor-trailer drivers.

When my eyes opened the next morning, I found myself staring directly at the digital readout on the clock-radio. I was just in time to see it flip from 9:09 to 9:10. By the time it flipped to 9:11 I was already buttoning my shirt and repeating Ilona's name over and over again, louder each time.

"No breakfast," she muttered from the depths of the pillows.

"It's nine-fifteen; I'm missing my call." This didn't seem to register with her. "I need a ride," I said, my voice involuntarily harsh.

"Oh goddam, I'm sorry," she said. She whipped back the bed sheets and landed her feet into a pair of silk, Persian-looking slippers. "I'm usually awake before seven no matter how late I go to bed."

Ten minutes later we were pulling up in front of the house in Fort Lee. Ilona was looking disheveled and bleary-eyed in her bathrobe and glasses. I kissed her quickly and said, "I'll call you," but I had slammed the car door and was already halfway to the basement door before I realized that I didn't have her number.

There was no answer at either my parents' or sister's in Jacksonville. I let the phone ring twenty times at each place before telling myself aloud that of course they were all at the hospital, where I should have been with them.

I looked at my watch. 9:37. Nothing terrible could possibly have happened in thirty-seven minutes, could it?

I made myself a cup of coffee and sat down next to the phone by the window. Mrs. Bromberg and Mr. Yamada—my unmarried, middle-aged landlords—were flitting around the

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backyard, billing and cooing over the rhododendrons. Mr. Yamada had been the previous occupant of my basement apartment, living in Fort Lee for a three-year stint with the American branch of a Japanese tire company. At the end of the three years, he had gotten himself an indefinite extension and moved upstairs with Mrs. Bromberg, a widow with political connections. Now, watching them together in the backyard, I suddenly wished that I had invited Ilona in to wait with me. I knew that it would have been unfair of me to ask her—we had only known each other for fifteen hours, after all—but I felt she would have come in anyway. I imagined her at the stove in my little closet kitchenette, pouring water into a cone of ground coffee.

I looked at my watch again. It was getting late. "God, god, god," I said aloud. Outside, Mrs. Bromberg cackled from behind the rhododendrons.

The phone rang at 11:45. I ran toward it and grabbed the receiver, unable even to say the word "hello" until I had heard my father's small voice saying, "She's fine, Roscoe. The doctor says she's doing just fine."

About an hour later, Ilona telephoned. I was just swabbing up the last of my breakfast—nitrates and cholesterol, as my mother called bacon and eggs—when the call came through. "Everything OK?" she asked.

"My mother's fine," I told her, feeling expansive and relaxed. "How did you get my number?"

"Do you mean, how did I distinguish you from all of the other Roscoe Boghosians in the book?"

"Oh, right," I said, smiling. Outside, framed in the window, Mr. Yamada was holding up a long-rooted dandelion for Mrs. Bromberg's inspection. As she stooped to get a closer look, Mr. Yamada quickly slipped the dandelion down the front of her shirt, causing Mrs. Bromberg to shriek with delight. "This is really nice of you to call," I said.

"Yeah, it is. Listen, how'd you like to drive with me to my studio and see the work?" I was later to find that this was how she always referred to her paintings, as "the work." As if they were already a part of our collective cultural heritage.

"I can be ready by one-thirty," I said.

She picked me up in the Lincoln. Ilona looked freshly

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scrubbed in the spring sunshine. She wore a bright red sweatshirt (which clashed with her reddish hair), horn-rimmed sunglasses, paint-smeared jeans, and tennis shoes. "The studio's just the other side of the Hackensack," she said as we accelerated into traffic on Route 4. "When the work's going shittily, I call it the River Styx, yuk, yuk."

Her studio was exactly what I had imagined: an enormous, cluttered white room with twelve-foot ceilings and windows on three walls radiating brightness. The floor, covered with narrow sneakerprints and dirt scuffs, was littered with paintings in various stages of completion. Folded pieces of paper were being glued to other pieces of paper and held in place by piles of jacketless hardcover books. I picked up one of the books—*The Life Beyond: Do We Die at Death?*

"I buy them by the pound," she said, taking the book from me and placing it back where it was. Then she led me across the room to the one windowless wall. "These are a couple of finished ones." Five six-foot-square, ragged-edged canvases hung there—all shiny browns and blacks, laced with raised stitch-marks and painted hieroglyphs. Little red arrows pointed meaningfully toward smears of black mud. Pieces of frayed rope hung from laminated screws and bolts stuck through the canvas.

"I love them," I told her. And I did, instantly; they were stark and somber, and the hieroglyphs seemed like symbols that had nothing in particular to symbolize, but that created an aura of withheld secrets.

"They're part of a sequence called 'Animal Magnetism,' " she explained. "I'm showing them at a gallery in Philadelphia in July. When everybody's away at the beach."

We spent a couple of hours in the studio, drinking black coffee and looking at her other series, including *Consuming Fire*, the one dedicated to her parents. Then (prompted by a collection of Kafka's stories holding down the edge of one of her paintings) we got into a conversation about what insects we would choose to be if we were forced to be insects. Ilona said she would choose to be a cockroach, but a rural as opposed to an urban cockroach, since people in the country didn't step on bugs the way they do in other places. I said I would be a praying mantis.

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Later on, we lay together on her divan. I was watching the shadows of her canvases, trying to perceive their slow movement across the floor as the sun dipped lower and lower in the windows. Ilona was asleep beside me, snoring in a quiet, charming way. I could feel her chest rise and fall under my hand—like a respirator bag, inflating, deflating, and then, with the infallibility of a machine, inflating again.

4

Joyce was filling the food trays with treated pellets. "Tennessee huh?" she said, shepherding the pellets into a pile with gloved fingers. "Got to watch out for the Southern belletypes, you know. They've got their secret priorities. She'll have you registered at Saks before you even know it."

I took a tray from her table and brought it over to one of the cages. "Not this Southern belle," I said. The mice were making the desperate squeaking sounds they always made at feeding time. I opened the slot and slid the tray in quickly. "Ilona's not the registering type."

"Oh, you'd be surprised." Joyce, the other senior assistant in the Secaucus lab, was also one of my best friends. She was around fifty years old, with a tough, wizened face and wrinkled, bony hands inside her rubber gloves. She had been divorced twice and dumped, she said, more times than she cared to think about. Joyce had a snide remark for every would-be romance she heard about, but once I had caught her in her cubicle at lunch hour, crying over the last few pages of *Jane Eyre*.

"She's a bohemian *artiste*, my dear Ms. Winchester," I said. "One with a white Lincoln Continental, granted, but a bohemian *artiste* nonetheless."

"Oh, one of *those*," she said, putting down the bag of pellets and picking up the last dish. "Lives only for her art, right? I had a husband like that once. Transformed all of his emotions into long, incomprehensible poems and didn't have any left over for me."

I laughed, but the image of Ilona's *Consuming Fire* paintings flashed uneasily through my head. "If I had a nickel for eve-

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ry one of your alleged husbands," I began, but just then the phone in my cubicle let out an electronic warble.

"Hello, Roscoe?" I immediately recognized Ilona's voice over the phone. It was a Tuesday, two and a half weeks after we first met. We had seen each other five or six times since the afternoon at her studio—once to go bowling and a couple of evenings to go out to eat—and I had spent the night at her house each time. "Listen, sorry to be calling you at work, but think you can drive out to the studio tonight after you get off? There's somebody here I want you to meet."

"Sure, I'd love to," I said. "Who is it?"

"It's a surprise. Can you make it by seven? Your car's fixed, isn't it?"

"Picked it up this morning," I said. But I was thinking: why does it have to be a surprise?

"And could you stop at Fong's on the way in? I'm leaving them an order this afternoon. Just ask for the one under the name of Beauregard."

"Beauregard?" I asked, trying to remember where I had heard the name before.

"Beauregard," she said.

"I'd like you to meet my beau, Roscoe Boghosian," Ilona twanged, hanging on the arm of a tall, middle-aged man with reddish-blond hair and a gray tie with a tight, out-jutting knot. "This is Michael Davis Beauregard."

"Uncle Mike is what she means." The man, laughing as he spoke, reached out his hand. "And I don't talk anything like the way she makes fun of," he said, talking exactly the way she had made fun of. "Pleased to see you, there, Roscoe."

"And you, sir," I said, finally making the connection between this face and the one in Ilona's oil portrait.

"Mike had to see a client in the city, so he stopped by on his way back to Newark Airport." Ilona grabbed my hand and pulled the two of us to the far corner of the studio, where she had set up a spindle-legged card table with three chairs. "So far, I've gotten him to take off his jacket. If we're lucky, we might even get him to loosen up that awful tie. Is that the order from Fong's?" she asked me.

I held up the paper bag in my other hand.

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"Oh yes, I recognize the grease stain." Ilona sat us down in the chairs and ran toward the little refrigerator. "Mike's flight is leaving in three hours, so we don't have much time," she said breathlessly. "He's got to be back in Knoxville before Grandma Beauregard's curfew."

"I wanted to take you both someplace nice," Mike said to me, looking a little embarrassed. "But Ilona forbade it."

"Oh, he would have taken us to some stiff Italian place with a maître d'," Ilona said with a snort. She put down three glasses and a vodka bottle veined with frost. "The waiter would have said things like, 'And what would the lady desire?' Yuk."

Uncle Mike looked at me with a helpless expression and shrugged. "I like Italian food," he said.

Ilona let out another snort.

"I took her to a place like that last Saturday," I told Mike as Ilona poured the vodka. "French. When the waiter asked her if she wanted something with her pâté, she turned to him and, with a straight face, said, 'Yes, garçon, I'll take some ketchup!'"

"Ilona! Really?" Mike looked honestly scandalized.

"Wait, wait! Tell the rest," Ilona urged, patting my shoulder. But before I could, she did herself, in her hoarse, cracking voice: "When he finally brought it, I said, 'Ketchup! On pâté? Are you mad?'"

I glanced over at Uncle Mike, who had a look of infinite pity on his face. I lifted up my shot glass of vodka. "We'll never be able to set foot in the fashionable part of Paramus again," I intoned.

"*Quelle tragédie*," Ilona said with one eyebrow raised. Then, lifting her own glass, she proposed, "To Uncle Mike."

"No, no," Mike protested. "To Ilona."

"Tuh the two a yous," I said in my best Jersey accent, and then the three of us knocked back the vodka in perfect unison.

Later, as we drove to her house after dropping Mike at the airport, Ilona was quiet. She had insisted on driving herself, since her "two men," as she now called us, hadn't held their alcohol as they should have. Mike had protested, but had ca-

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pitulated in the end. "There's no opposing this one, you know, Roscoe," he told me as the three of us piled into the front seat of the Lincoln. "Consider yourself warned." Now, after seeing him off on the last flight to Knoxville, we were barreling north along the Turnpike, wrapped in a contented alcoholic fog—or at least one of us was; when Ilona said something about returning Mike's rental car to the airport next day, I realized that, while I was floating, she had been thinking, concentrating, planning. It made me feel absurdly safe.

"You know, Roscoe," she began, after a long silence during which I had almost fallen asleep against the upholstered door, "where I come from, this night marks an important point in a young man's courtship. You've met my family."

I opened my eyes and saw her smiling at the highway as a sheet of light swept past her face. "Not bad for two and a half weeks. Most Knoxville boys don't reach this point for months."

"Mike's great," I said. Then, after a moment: "I only wish I could've met your parents."

Ilona kept her eyes on the road. Another sheet of light started creeping up toward her neck.

"Was your mother anything like Mike?" I asked.

Ilona turned to check her blind spot and then changed lanes. "No," she said at last, "not really," and I understood that the conversation had ended.

5

We developed a routine after a while. Two or three days a week, I'd head out to the studio at the end of my eight-to-four shift at the lab, arriving just as she was putting the last splat of paint on one of the "Animal Magnetism" canvases. Most weekends we'd be together from Friday night to Sunday night. We did things—restaurants, movies, the usual dates—but what we did most was hang out at the studio. We'd lie together on the divan, surrounded by her paintings, and watch the evening light turn them orange. Sometimes we'd just lie there, quietly, listening to distant dog barks or the occasional duck snigger from the river; or else we'd sip vodka

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and I'd read to her from *The Life Beyond: Do We Die at Death?*, which I had made her promise not to throw away. I'd read her my favorite passage: "I was in this dark tunnel, and there was this buzzing noise, like hundreds of bees all at once, and I was following this distant pinpoint of light . . ."

She was axing boyfriends, Ilona said. For me. None of them had been serious, but a few had been regular dates. She said that men were like comets, each with his own periodicity: some of them called once every two weeks, others once a month; one guy, she told me, called her once a year—on the Fourth of July, to go to see the fireworks at Overpeck Park. But now, as each one checked in on schedule, she was telling them thanks but no thanks. She was seeing someone seriously.

One Saturday, as we were moving a couch in her living room at home, she asked to see my article on the Armenian massacres. "It seems important to you, so I should know about it, no?" I gave her my only copy and then didn't hear about it again for several weeks. I was just beginning to think that she had lost it when, one afternoon in July, I drove out to her studio and found a bunch of new paintings, all slashed paper and red pigments. "This some new series?" I asked her.

"It's called, 'Armenia.' I'm using your article as a reference. Mind?"

"My father will fall in love with you," I said.

It was because things seemed to be going so well that I was surprised—shocked even—when she refused to see me one night. "I can't, Roscoe," she said over the phone. "I really can't."

"But we said tonight we'd get together."

"It can't be tonight, I'm sorry."

"Just for ten minutes, then. We can time it on the clock. Where are you, at the pay phone?"

"Damn it, Roscoe. No."

"I'm asking for ten minutes!"

"What the fuck do I have to do? Do I have to hang up?"

"Five minutes! I don't understand. What's wrong?"

"Just let me alone for a while, OK? I don't want to talk anymore now. I'll call you. Good-bye." I heard a click and then that blanket of muffled silence: Ilona had hung up.

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I sat at the phone table for a long time, staring at my living room. The light was failing, making little pools of murkiness in corners and under tables and chairs. Twilight. It was the time of day when people looked up half-consciously from what they were doing to flip on a lamp, when smells of cooking reached them from another room, where other people—mothers, spouses—stood at warm stoves and prepared dinner, raising their voices to make themselves heard over the bright sizzle of wholesome potatoes frying in a pan.

Ilona had reclaimed that time of day for me. Before, I had hated early evening. It was when I'd get those calls from Florida—my parents' voices speaking of things like arrhythmias, cholesterol, and kidney stones. But it also had something to do with twilight itself, with its sense of life drawing back, retreating behind locked doors and shutters. With Ilona, the coming of darkness was an opening up, not a closing down. It was the best time of the day, she told me once. Life only begins at sundown.

I reached up and pulled the chain on the lamp beside the phone, throwing the basement room into dim yellow light. Ilona had hung up on me. I thought: This is the way things end nowadays—with a telephone call. Voices on a wire tell you that your life has changed, drastically, irreparably.

I reached up and pulled the lamp chain again. Real darkness filled the room. I stood up, felt for the car keys in my pocket, and headed toward the door.

"You don't give up, do you?" Ilona said when I appeared at the studio.

I stepped past her from the shadowy hallway into bright space. Almost immediately, I could tell that something was different about the studio. The broad expanse of floor, usually buried beneath canvases and paint cans, was bare. All of Ilona's paintings were stacked against the walls, and her brushes and supplies were pushed into a corner. The room looked like what it once was—an empty warehouse. "I thought you were working tonight?" was the first thing that came out of my mouth.

"I came here to be alone, damn it. Damn you."

"I don't understand . . ." I turned and saw a navy blue dress hanging from the aluminum rack near the door. Beside it was a small green suitcase. "You're going," I said.

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"To Knoxville. At 7:30 tomorrow morning. My Uncle Mike had a massive stroke." She stood with one hand on the open door.

I stared at her hand and couldn't think of anything to say.

"I got the message on my machine at home. I was going to call you from the airport and tell you. Then I would've been back after the funeral and that would've been it. We could've just picked up where we left off."

"You would've gone without seeing me?"

Ilona sighed, moving her hand down the door to the knob. "Look," she said, "give me a few hours, OK? Come back at eleven or something and we can spend the night here. But I need a few hours."

I felt totally disoriented, as if Ilona had been mouthing nonsense syllables to me. But I understood the words. She was flying to a funeral in the morning, and she wanted me to leave. I stepped toward her and put my arms clumsily around her shoulders. "I'm sorry about Mike," I said.

"Me too," Ilona said over my shoulder, crossing her arms tightly around my waist. We held each other for a few seconds; I expected at every moment to feel her sobs against my shoulder. Finally, she gently pushed my body away. "Come back at eleven."

I didn't move. "No," I said.

"What?"

"No, I'm not leaving."

Ilona crossed her arms in front of her. "I'm asking you to leave."

I walked past her, away from the door. "Ilona, no. I'm the guy you're seeing seriously, remember? You should need me here with you."

"I need a few hours alone, Roscoe." She uncrossed her arms, and then quickly crossed them again. "I can't believe you're doing this. I'm asking to be alone."

"Alone!" I shouted. I knew I was behaving terribly, but I couldn't stop myself. The resentment was welling up in me. "What the hell is wrong with you, anyway? Doesn't all this do anything to you?"

She stared at me with something like real hatred in her face. "You want drama, don't you," she said quietly, menacingly. "Convulsions, tears, the whole number. Like your little

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Armenian melodrama—sentimental moaning about people you've never even met. That's the way you want it, right?"

I kicked a chair—the only way my body seemed capable of responding. The chair skidded across the floor and fell over on its side.

"Get the hell out now," she said then, jerking the door wider. "Now!"

I looked at her face. The mouth was a straight, hard line. The nose seemed closer to bleeding than ever. "I'm going," I said. I walked past her again into the dim stairwell.

She slammed the door behind me, making the metal railings hum in their loose, gray supports.

I went home first. I sat for an hour in my basement apartment, trying to do some reading for work, but the words on the page didn't seem to make any sense. Then I tried listening to music. I had the volume up so loud that Mr. Yamada came downstairs with a set of headphones, which he offered to lend me for as long as I needed them. He said that he also enjoyed listening to rock music at very high volume.

Finally, after watching my bedside clock flip all the minutes from 9:04 to 9:08, I got up, put on my shoes, and drove to the lab in Secaucus. Joyce was there, working late. "Just in time to help," she said, lifting up a cage full of white mice and carrying it across the room. The clock on the wall above her said 9:33. "Kraus is finished with all of these," she said, tossing her head toward the pile of cages in one corner of the lab. "A hundred and seventy-five mice to meet their maker this fine evening. And guess who got stuck with the dirty work. This is batch number three already."

Joyce put the cage down on a table. She reached her rubber-gloved hand into the cage and grabbed one of the mice by the tail. "Worst part of this damned job," she said as she spun it suddenly by the tail and cracked it hard against the marble table top. "Poor things." She tossed the dead mouse into a plastic garbage bag at her feet. "I could use a hand, if you've got a mind to," she said in a slightly louder voice.

"Sorry. I've got a ton of data to collate," I mumbled as I stepped toward my cubicle. No, I decided, I wouldn't tell Joyce. She would just shake her head knowingly, as if I were just confirming something she already knew.

"Maybe next time," I heard as I shut the door of my cubi-

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cle. "Hell of a way to spend a Saturday night." Then: Whiz, crack, thud, as another mouse tumbled into the slowly-filling garbage bag.

When the phone beeped fifteen minutes later, I considered not answering. On the fifth beep, I grabbed it. "Listen, Roscoe," Ilona said without saying hello. "Come back at eleven, OK? We can spend the night out here."

I picked up a letter opener from my desk. "That's over an hour from now."

"At eleven," Ilona said.

From outside: Whiz, crack, thud. Whiz, crack, thud.

"At eleven," I said finally into the plastic mouthpiece.

"It's 11:03," Ilona said as she pulled open the gray fire door. "Did you hit traffic or something?"

"I was down in the parking lot. I guess my watch is slow."

Ilona pulled me into the room and closed the door behind me. "We'll have to leave here at six in the morning to get to Newark. I'll probably be gone for three days, so maybe you can water the aloes in the dining room on Monday. One pint of water for each." She led me across the room and sat me on the divan. "You can even stay there if you want to. The house is full of groceries; they'll be rotting in three days anyway." She retrieved a bottle of vodka from the little refrigerator and brought it, with two shot glasses, over to the divan. It was obvious to me that we were to forget everything that had happened earlier in the evening. Ilona poured the vodka, handed me one of the glasses, and sat down beside me. "I'm going to hate the next three days," she said after a slight pause.

We drank the cold, metallic-tasting vodka in our glasses. Then I said: "I'm going."

Ilona's head snapped toward me, sending a bobby pin careening across the floor. "Where?"

"To Knoxville," I answered, staring into my shot glass.

Ilona put her hand on the inside of my thigh. "Roscoe," she began.

"I'm going to Knoxville with you or else we're splitting up."

Ilona took my glass and put it on the floor. "Well," she said at last, "let's hope Piedmont has an extra seat." She pulled my leg up over her own. "You want to try to sleep?" she asked.

"I won't be able to," I said. "Will you?"

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"No. Not for a while, at least." She lay back on the divan, looking up at me until I stretched out beside her. "The lights are on," Ilona whispered.

"Let's leave them," I said. A large fly was in the studio. I could hear it across the room, buzzing and thudding against the walls.

"Try and sleep some," she said.

"I told you, I won't be able to."

"Well, just try, OK? I'll wake you up in plenty of time, don't worry. This time I even set the alarm." She shifted the weight of my head on her arm and put her other hand on the small of my back.

"You get some sleep, too," I said to her.

She pulled my body closer to hers. "It's a deal," she said.

7

Ilona and I talk sometimes about moving in together. The house in Englewood Cliffs, of course, could absorb me and my earthly possessions without even blinking. At idle moments during the day, I try to imagine my white Impala parked next to her white Lincoln in the semi-detached garage, or my Flintstones jelly glasses standing next to her Danford Fire Department beer mugs in the kitchen cabinets. There's room for everything in that house.

It's been three weeks since we got back from the funeral. During our three days in Knoxville, not a single cloud appeared in the blue Tennessee sky. The trip almost seemed like a vacation. We even got to ride some of Mike's horses the day before we left, galloping along shaded country roads to a little pond, where we swam and ate cream cheese and jelly sandwiches on a big rock crawling with salamanders.

The funeral itself was as unlike an Armenian funeral as I could imagine. Everyone looked marvelously fashionable in their dark suits and black mourning dresses. One woman—a cousin, I think—wore a wide-brimmed hat that kept flapping in the breeze. Later, during the funeral dinner at an Italian restaurant in Knoxville, people laughed and told funny anecdotes about Mike, as if it were a ceremonial dinner for someone who was retiring from the family firm. "Well, we got through it," Ilona said to me on the plane back to Newark.

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"Yes," I said, and I squeezed her hand, but I remember thinking, We got *through* it?

Since then, Ilona and I have become collaborators. At her suggestion, we're turning my article on Armenia into an "educational/aesthetic experience" with alternating pictures and text blocks. I'm rewriting the article—sticking to the pure facts this time—having sections of it printed on six-foot-square pieces of plexiglass. Ilona is creating massive collages of maps, newspapers, and old photographs of victims of the massacre. She says she wants the show to inform the audience without imposing any kind of interpretation of the event. Bullshit, I say to myself, but I go along with it anyway. I enjoy working side by side with Ilona. Besides, the owner of Ilona's regular gallery in Paramus has agreed to sponsor the project and is trying to get funding for it from several private foundations and a group called the North Jersey Armenian-American Friendship Society (which even my parents have never heard of). The show is scheduled to open in December. My parents ("God willing," they say) are flying up for the opening night cocktail party.

Meanwhile, the two of us have been spending enormous amounts of time together at the studio—me with my books and papers, Ilona with her glues and mudpaints. We even sleep there occasionally. We've furnished the place with a double air mattress and a two-burner hotplate, so that we can disappear for days at a time—on cold, dreary weekends, leaving behind only an enigmatic message on Ilona's answering machine. On those weekends, I'll arrive after work on Friday with two orders from Fong's and a bottle of wine. We'll spend a few hours eating and drinking, then a few hours working. At eleven or midnight, we'll switch off all the lights, undress, and get under the covers on the limp air mattress. I'll turn to the all-news station on the radio next to the mattress. And then—amid the endless litany of fires, explosions, murders, and natural disasters—we'll gradually drift into sleep.

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KATE JENNINGS

Wrist

for Anne

End of the day and I'm tired and supper's
already in the oven when you ask to go out
to gather chestnuts. You've been so brave
and gutsy about all this that I agree. We
slip out at dusk. The long cast on your
small arm is bone white in the half light.
I hold the basket while you fill it with
varnished nuggets. To take your mind off
the constant ache and awkwardness and itch
and two weeks more of it, I suggest we take

the witch walk home, and we conjure up what
a witch's house would look like: a dusty
lawn with seedy autumn flowers, a turret
stuffed with cobwebs and bats, creek banks
being eaten away, the shade trees dead and
just waiting for the first moonless night
to fall through the roof, every door hinge
is rusty, there are mice in the walls—
you shiver and laugh. I'll let supper
cinder to hear that giggle. I whisper

(full dark now) about adder's tongue
and rue, nightshade, henbane, names
no more foreign to you than marron.
You're distracted and I'm satisfied
but I feel you shiver with more than
the cutting gusting wind so I assure
you that the minute you put your foot
over the threshold of a witch's house,
the view from every window would be
field after field of heart's ease.

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The Night Wind: Charles Burchfield

Any child would huddle in bed at night
to hear the fanged night wind slamming
and banging like that at the windows
with fists, with the strength of rage,

to see those crazed eyes spooking over
the rooftop: Whose eyes are those?
I was afraid he might be scared so

I went in to him only to find him
laughing and he showed me the cave
he'd made of his quilt, and I stood
by his bed in the dark, thinking of
how I'd screamed at him that morning,

used him to brunt my anger and fatigue
and frustration. I wanted to weep with
guilt and shame, with sorrow, to try to
tell him I'm so sorry, David, I'm sorry!

The warm lights at the center of that
storm are yellow: someone has drawn
white curtains against the dark but
the curtains gape and let the yellow

lamplight shine through: a glimpse
of safety, of shelter in the midst
of grim gloom and it's that yellow
light that defines the shape of the
wind. Somehow my son has withstood

my screeching anger, the storm I so
often am, and can laugh and make a
safe cave of his quilt and show it

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off to me and maybe he even forgives
me as we listen together to the wind
hammering at the windows of his room
and shaking the walls of this house.

Pumpkin

Only a week now till Hallowe'en, and I'm still stumped.
You'd think a pumpkin would be easy enough to find in
October. I picture roadside stands, or the state fair:
wooden tables sagging under the weight of pumpkins and
squash, yellow freckled gourds warty as toads; or maybe

a cornfield, cornstalks stacked, us poking among shocks
to choose a pumpkin, the skin waxy and dusty, the color
uneven. A simple matter to pick a pumpkin and carve it,
your knife moving smoothly through the wet flesh to cut
half moons for eyes, square teeth to fill a scowl; stick

the crooked stem in the nose hole and coax a stub of wax
to stand up straight inside. Then strike matches in the
scorched damp musk till the candle finally catches light
and burns. The nip of cider, ghosts and tramps coming by
to beg, ears of dried corn on the front door to thump at

dusk in the rising wind, and your pumpkin, his lit wick
turning him into a lamp, crouching on his bright orange
rump on the windowsill. Then it might be a week before
he gives up at last and caves in, a fruit fly speckled
ruin. Homesick in Geneva in October, head filled with

plans, I go out to shop, willing to pay the price for
mood; and at the market stop, stunned, to stare at the
only pumpkin: sliced like a melon, each slice wrapped
in waxed paper, a vegetable for sale by the gram, to be
diced and fried or poached or stewed and eaten as food.

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Mail Delivery by Moonlight

The mailman flicks the rusted red flag up,
then rifles through his pouch and stuffs
the box with letters. The moon's white

as ice and featureless and full enough
to dim the truck's high-beam headlights.
The mailman stands ankle-deep in leaves.

The woman wakes, murmuring, "I'm waiting
to hear from someone." She's confused,
wondering if she said it or if she only
dreamed she did. She has to struggle
to think what time it is, what night.

The room's bright with moonlight.
She remembers who she dreamed of,
and knows morning might bring letters
from them both, or the phone might ring

any moment now. And was it the hum
of the truck's engine that woke her,
or the small snap of the mailbox door
closing? In truth no weird ability's

involved, no gift, she tells herself.
It's all coincidence. Relax. There's
nothing to be scared of. Still thick
with dreams, she tries to reason back
to sleep. Outside in the chilled night

the letters are waiting for her. One
will start, "You always know, and you
know it." The other will include

snapshots. The mailman's face is
shadowed. The truck drives off.
The red flag is up, straight up.

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Faithless Moon

Under its rueful light he nudges his booted feet
into the pile of cold ashes left from the leaves
that burned so gaily at dusk to thrill and warm

his children. He looks toward the little hollow,
filled with mist, that fireflies lit only weeks ago,
in another season. He's thinking of another autumn,

of a woman's face (a girl's face, really) chilled
and laughing and trustful in the fitful moonlight.

Annoyed with himself, for of course by now he's long
beyond sentiment, he conjures up the faces of other

girls, other women, his wife's, to blur that face,
to blunt the persistent tug of sadness. He walks

down the small slope and looks up at his lit house:
his sons are asleep. His wife is reading in bed.

Betrayal, ambition, the battery of lusts he's tried
to satisfy, his appetites endless. The price had

seemed worth it; the pain, after all, was not his.
He stoops to knock the ashes from his boots, then

can't get that fine soft dust off his hands. He
claps them briskly, gives up. He lifts his eyes
to the overcast moon. What warmth he ever found

there is gone now, dissipated like the damp mist
rising from the hollow he's standing in, telling
himself he's still young. He regrets everything.

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DANA GIOIA

Notes on the New Formalism

1

Twenty years ago it was a truth universally acknowledged that a young poet in possession of a good ear would want to write free verse. Today one faces more complex and problematic choices. While the overwhelming majority of new poetry published in the U.S. continues to be in "open" forms, for the first time in two generations there is a major revival of formal verse among young poets. The first signs of this revival emerged at the tail end of the seventies, long after the more knowing critics had declared rhyme and meter permanently defunct. First a few good formal books by young poets like Charles Martin's *Room For Error* (1978) and Timothy Steele's *Uncertainties and Rest* (1979) appeared but went almost completely unreviewed. Then magazines like *Paris Review* which hadn't published a rhyming poem in anyone's memory, suddenly began featuring sonnets, villanelles, and syllabics. Changes in literary taste make good copy, and the sharper reviewers quickly took note. Soon some of the most lavishly praised debuts like Brad Leithauser's *Hundreds of Fireflies* (1982) and Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* (1986) were by poets working entirely in form.

Literature not only changes; it must change to keep its force and vitality. There will always be groups advocating new types of poetry, some of it genuine, just as there will always be conservative opposing forces trying to maintain the conventional models. But the revival of rhyme and meter among some young poets creates an unprecedented situation in American poetry. The new formalists put free verse poets in the ironic and unprepared position of being the status quo. Free verse, the creation of an older literary revolution, is now the long-established, ruling orthodoxy; formal poetry the unexpected challenge.

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There is currently a great deal of private controversy about these new formalists, some of which occasionally spills over into print. Significantly, these discussions often contain many odd misconceptions about poetic form, most of them threadbare clichés which somehow still survive from the sixties. Form, we are told authoritatively, is artificial, elitist, retrogressive, right-wing, and (my favorite) un-American. None of these arguments can withstand critical scrutiny, but nevertheless, they continue to be made so regularly that one can only assume they provide some emotional comfort to their advocates. Obviously, for many writers the discussion of formal and free verse has become an encoded political debate.

When the language of poetic criticism has become so distorted, one needs to make some fundamental distinctions. Formal verse, like free verse, is neither intrinsically bad nor good. The terms are strictly descriptive not evaluative. They define distinct sets of metrical technique rather than rank the quality or nature of poetic performance. Nor do these techniques automatically carry with them social, political, or even, in most cases, aesthetic values. (It would, for example, be very easy for a poet to do automatic writing in meter. One might even argue that surrealism is best realized in formal verse since the regular rhythms of the words in meter hypnotically release the unconscious.) However obvious these distinctions should be, few poets or critics seem to be making them. Is it any wonder then that so much current writing on poetry is either opaque or irrelevant? What serious discussion can develop when such primary critical definitions fail to be made with accuracy?

2

Meter is an ancient, indeed primitive, technique that marks the beginning of literature in virtually every culture. It dates back to a time, so different from our specialized modern era, when there was little, if any, distinction between poetry, religion, history, music, and magic. All were performed in a sacred, ritual language separated from everyday speech by its incantatory metrical form. Meter is also essentially a pre-literate technology, a way of making language memorable before the invention of writing. Trained poet-singers took the events

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and ideas a culture wanted to preserve—tribal histories, magic ceremonies—formulated them in meter, and committed these formulas to memory. Before writing, the poet and the poem were inseparable, and both represented the collective memory of their culture.

Meter is therefore an aural technique. It assumes a speaker and a listener, who for the duration of the poem are intertwined. Even in later literary cultures meter has always insisted on the primacy of the physical sound of language. Unlike prose, which can be read silently with full enjoyment, poetry demands to be recited, heard, even memorized for its true appreciation. Shaping the words in one's mouth is as much part of the pleasure as hearing the sounds in the air. Until recently education in poetry always emphasized memorization and recitation. This traditional method stressed the immediately communicable and communal pleasures of the art. Certainly a major reason for the decline in poetry's popular audience stems directly from the abandonment of this aural education for the joylessly intellectual approach of critical analysis.

Free verse is a much more modern technique that presupposes the existence of written texts. While it does not abandon the aural imagination—no real poetry can—most free verse plays with the way poetic language is arranged on a page and articulates the visual rhythm of a poem in a way earlier method verse rarely bothered to. Even the earliest known free verse, the Hebrew Psalms (which actually inhabit a middle ground between free and formal verse since they follow a principle of syntatic but not metrical symmetry) were created by "the people of the Book" in a culture uniquely concerned with limiting the improvisatory freedom of the bard for the fixed message of the text.

Most often one first notices the visual orientation of free verse in trivial ways (the lack of initial capitals at the beginning of lines, the use of typographical symbols like "&" and "7," the arbitrary use of upper- or lower-case letters). E. E. Cummings spent his life exploiting these tricks trying to create a visual vocabulary for modern poetry. Eventually, however, one sees how the visual field of the page is essential to the organization of sound in free verse. Rearranged in prose lines, a free verse poem usually changes radically. Its rhythms

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move differently from their original printed form (whereas most metrical verse would still retain its basic rhythmic design and symmetry). This visual artifice separates free verse from speech. Technological innovation affects art, and it is probably not accidental that the broad-scale development of free verse came from the first generation of writers trained from childhood on the shift-key typewriter introduced in 1878. This new device allowed writers to predict accurately for the first time the *look* of their words on the printed page rather than just their sound.

All free verse deals with the fundamental question of how and when to end lines of poetry when there is no regular meter to measure them out. The earliest free verse matched the line with some syntactic unit of sense (in Hebrew poetry, for instance, the line was most often a double unit of parallel syntactic sense):

1 Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain
that build it:
Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh
but in vain.

2 It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late,
To eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his
beloved sleep.

Psalm 127

Once free verse leaves the strict symmetry of sacred Hebrew poetry, there is no way for the ear to judge accurately from the sounds alone the metrical structure of a poem (unless the reader exaggerates the line breaks). Sometimes one wonders if even the poet hears the purely aural pattern of his words. Most critics do not. For instance, it has never been noted that the most famous American free verse poem of the twentieth century, William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow," is not free verse at all but two rather undistinguished lines of blank verse:

so much depends upon a red wheel barrow
glazed with rain water beside the white chickens.

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One reason that these lines have proved so memorable is that they are familiarly metrical—very similar in rhythm to another famous passage of blank verse, even down to the "feminine" endings of the lines:

> To be or not to be that is the question
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer . . .

That Williams wrote blank verse while thinking he was pioneering new trails in prosody doesn't necessarily invalidate his theories (though it may lead one to examine them with a certain skepticism). This discrepancy, however, does suggest two points. First, even among its adversaries, metrical language exercises a primitive power, even if it is frequently an unconscious one. Second, the organizing principle of Williams' free verse is visual. What makes "The Red Wheelbarrow" free verse is not the sound alone, which is highly regular, but the visual placement of those sounds on the page.

> so much depends
> upon
>
> a red wheel
> barrow
>
> glazed with rain
> water
>
> beside the white
> chickens.

Here the words achieve a new symmetry, alien to the ear, but no less genuine. The way Williams arranges the poem into brief lines and stanzas slows the language until every word acquires an unusual weight. This deliberate visual placement twists a lackluster blank verse couplet into a provocatively original free verse lyric which challenges the reader's definition of what constitutes a poem. Much of the poem's impact comes from catching the reader off guard and forcing him to reread it in search of what he has missed because

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nothing of what Williams has said comprises a satisfactory poem in a conventional sense. The element of surprise makes this type of poem a difficult trick to repeat and may explain why so much of the minimalist poetry written in the Williams tradition is so dull. The poetic experience comes in the re-reading as the reader consciously revises his own superficial first impression and sees the real importance of Williams' seemingly mundane images. Just as Williams' imagery works by challenging the reader to see the despoiled modern world as charged with a new kind of beauty, so too does his prosody operate by making everyday words acquire a new weight by their unexpectedly bold placement on the page. No aural poem could work in this way.

3

The current moment is a fortunate one for poets interested in traditional form. Two generations now of younger writers have largely ignored rhyme and meter, and most of the older poets who worked originally in form (such as Louis Simpson and Adrienne Rich) have abandoned it entirely for more than a quarter of a century. Literary journalism has long declared it defunct, and most current anthologies present no work in traditional forms by Americans written after 1960. The British may have continued using rhyme and meter in their quaint, old-fashioned way and the Irish in their primitive, bardic manner, but for up-to-date Americans, it became the province of the old, the eccentric, and the Anglophilic. It was a style that dared not speak its name, except in light verse. Even the tri-nominate, blue-haired lady laureates now wrote in free verse.[1] By 1980 there had been such a decisive break with the literary past that in America for the first time in the history of modern English most published young poets could

[1] The editors of *The Hudson Review* ask, as perhaps they should, if this statement is a sexist stereotype. I offer it rather as investigative journalism based on painful, first-hand knowledge of the work of such important contemporary poets as Sudie Stuart Hager, Winifred Hamrick Farrar, Maggie Culver Fry, Helen von Kolnitz Hyer, Louise McNeill Pease, and the late Peggy Simson Curry (the official poets laureate of Idaho, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, West Virginia, and Wyoming respectively). When such poets write in free verse, how can that style not be said to belong to the establishment?

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not write with minimal competence in traditional meters (not that this failing bothered anyone). Whether this was an unprecedented cultural catastrophe or a glorious revolution is immaterial to this discussion. What matters is that most of the craft of traditional English versification had been forgotten.

Since 1960 there has also been relatively little formal innovation done by the mainstream either in metrical or free verse. Radical experimentation like concrete poetry or language poetry has been pushed off to the fringes of the literary culture where it either has been ignored by the mainstream or declared irrelevant. At the same time most mainstream poets have done little of the more focused (and less radical) experimentation with meters or verse forms that open up new possibilities for poetic language. Since 1960 the only new verse forms to have entered the mainstream of American poetry have been two miniatures: the double dactyl and the ghazal, the latter usually in a dilute unrhymed version of the Persian original.

Indeed, the most influential form in American poetry over this quarter century has been the prose poem, which strictly speaking is not a verse form at all but a stylistic alternative to verse as the medium for poetry. In theory the prose poem is the most protean form of free verse in which all line breaks disappear as a highly charged lyric poem achieves the ultimate organic form. In recent American practice, however, it has mostly become a kind of absurdist parable having more to do with the prose tradition of Kafka and Borges than the poetic tradition of Baudelaire and Rimbaud. As poetry literally became written in prose, was it any wonder that verse technique suffered?

Likewise, although the past quarter century has witnessed an explosion of poetic translation, this boom has almost exclusively produced work that is formally vague and colorless. Compared to most earlier translation, these contemporary American versions make no effort whatsoever to reproduce the prosodic features of their originals. One can now read most of Dante or Villon, Rilke or Mandelstam, Lorca or even Petrarch in English without any sense of the poem's original form. Sometimes these versions brilliantly convey the theme or tone of the originals, but more often they sound stylistical-

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ly impoverished and anonymous. All of the past blurs together into a familiar tune. Unrhymed, unmetered, and unshaped, Petrarch and Rilke sound misleadingly alike.

This method of translating foreign poetry into an already available contemporary style also brings less to the language than the more difficult attempt to recreate a foreign form in English (as Sir Thomas Wyatt did for the Italian sonnet or the anonymous translators of the King James Bible did for the Hebrew Psalms). New verse forms and meters can have a liberating effect on poetry. They allow writers to say things that have never worked in poetry before or else to restate familiar things in original ways. Many of the most important forms in our language were once exotic imports—the sonnet, sestina, ballade, villanelle, triolet, terza rima, pantoum, rubaiyat, haiku, ottava rima, free verse, even the prose poem. Recent translation has done little to expand the formal resources of American poetry. Ironically it may have done more to deaden the native ear by translating all poetry of all ages into the same homogenous style. Studying great poetry in such neutralized versions, one gets little sense of how the forms adopted or invented by great writers are inseparable from their art. Not only the subtleties are lost but even the general scheme.

This assessment does not maintain that metrical innovation is necessary to write good poetry, that successful poetic translation must always follow the verse forms of the original or that prose is an impossible medium for poetry. It merely examines some current literary trends and speculates on both their origins and consequences. It also suggests that the recent dearth of formal poetry opens interesting possibilities for young poets to match an unexploited contemporary idiom with traditional or experimental forms. Indeed the current moment may even offer poets an opportunity for formal innovation and expansion unprecedented in the language since the end of the eighteenth century, for no age since then has been so metrically narrow or formally orthodox as our own.

4

For the arts at least there truly is a *Zeitgeist*, especially at moments of decisive change when they move together with

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amazing synchronization. We are now living at one such moment to which critics have applied the epithet "postmodern," an attractive term the meaning of which no two writers can agree on precisely because it does not yet have one. The dialectic of history is still moving too fast, and events still unforeseen will probably define this moment in ways equally unexpected. One day cultural historians will elucidate the connections between the current revival of formal and narrative poetry with this broader shift of sensibility in the arts. The return to tonality in serious music, to representation in painting, to decorative detail and non-functional design in architecture will link with poetry's reaffirmation of song and story as the most pervasive development of the American arts towards the end of this century.

No one today can accurately judge all of the deeper social, economic, and cultural forces driving this revival, but at least one central motivation seems clear. All these revivals of traditional technique (whether linked or not to traditional aesthetics) both reject the specialization and intellectualization of the arts in the academy over the past forty years and affirm the need for a broader popular audience. The modern movement, which began this century in bohemia, is now ending it in the university, an institution dedicated at least as much to the specialization of knowledge as to its propagation. Ultimately the mission of the university has little to do with the mission of the arts, and this long cohabitation has had an enervating effect on all the arts but especially on poetry and music. With the best of intentions the university has intellectualized the arts to a point where they have been cut off from the vulgar vitality of popular traditions and, as a result, their public has shrunk to groups of academic specialists and a captive audience of students, both of which refer to everything beyond the university as "the real world." Mainly poets read contemporary poetry, and only professional musicians and composers attend concerts of new music.

Like the new tonal composers, the young poets now working in form reject the split between their art and its traditional audience. They seek to reaffirm poetry's broader cultural role and restore its parity with fiction and drama. The poet, Wade Newman, has already linked the revival of form with the return to narrative and grouped these new writers as an

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"expansive movement" dedicated to reversing poetry's declining importance to the culture. These young poets, Newman claims, seek to engage their audience not by simplifying their work but by making it more relevant and accessible. They are also "expansive" in that they have expanded their technical and thematic concerns beyond the confines of the short, autobiographical free verse lyric which so dominates contemporary poetry. Obviously, the return to form and narrative are not the only possible ways of establishing the connection between the poet and the broader public, but it does represent one means of renewal, and if this particular "expansive movement" continues to develop successfully, American poetry will end this, its most distinguished century, with more promise to its future than one sees today.

5

One of the more interesting developments of the last five years has been the emergence of pseudo-formal verse. This sort of writing began appearing broadly a few years ago shortly after critics started advertising the revival of form. Pseudo-formal verse bears the same relationship to formal poetry as the storefronts on a Hollywood backlot do to a real city street. They both look vaguely similar from a distance. In pseudo-formal verse the lines run to more or less the same length on the page. Stanzas are neatly symmetrical. The syllable count is roughly regular line by line, and there may even be a few rhymes thrown in, usually in an irregular pattern.

Trying to open the window on a Hollywood façade, one soon discovers it won't budge. The architectural design has no structural function. Pseudo-formal verse operates on the same principle. It displays no comprehension of how meters operate in English to shape the rhythm of a poem. Though arranged in neat visual patterns, the words jump between incompatible rhythmic systems from line to line. The rhythms lack the spontaneity of free verse without ever achieving the focused energy of formal poetry. They grope towards a regular rhythmic shape but never reach it. Ultimately, there is little, if any, structural connection between the look and the sound of the poem.

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There are two kinds of pseudo-formal poem. The first type is the more sophisticated. It tries to be regularly metrical. The first line usually scans according to some common meter, but thereafter problems occur. The poet cannot sustain the pattern of sounds he or she has chosen and soon begins to make substitutions line by line, which may look consistent with the underlying form but actually organize the rhythms in incompatible ways. What results technically is usually neither good free verse nor formal verse. Here, for example, is the opening of a poem by a young writer widely praised as an accomplished formalist. (Most poetry reviewers call any poem that looks vaguely regular "formal.") This passage wants to be blank verse, but despite a few regular lines, it never sustains a consistent rhythm long enough to establish a metrical base:

> From this unpardoned perch, a kitchen table
> In a sunless walk-up in a city
> Of tangled boulevards, he tested
> The old, unwieldy nemesis—namelessness.
> Forgetting (he knew) couldn't be remedied
> But these gestures of identity (he liked to think)
> Rankled the equanimities of time:
> A conceit, of course, but preferable to
> The quarrels of the ego, the canter of
> Description or discoveries of the avant-garde.

At first glance this passage appears to be in blank verse. The poem's first line unfolds as regular iambic pentameter (with a feminine ending). The second line has ten syllables, too, but it scans metrically either as awkward trochees or pure syllabics. A regular iambic rhythm appears again in line three, but now it falls decisively one foot short. Line four begins as regular blank verse but then abruptly loses its rhythm in word play between "nemesis" and "namelessness." Line five can only be construed as free verse. After a vague start line six plays with a regular iambic movement but dissipates itself over thirteen syllables. And so it continues awkwardly till the end. Good blank verse can be full of substitutions, but the variations always play off of a clearly established pattern. Here the poem never establishes a clear rhythmic direction.

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The lines never quite become blank verse. They only allude to it.

The second type of pseudo-formal poem is more common because it is easier to write. It doesn't even try to make a regular pattern of sound, however awkwardly. It only wants to look regular. The lines have no auditory integrity, as free or formal verse. Their integrity is merely visual—in a gross and uninteresting sense. The same issue of *The Agni Review*, which published the previous example, also contains a poem in quatrains which has these representative stanzas:

> When at odd moments, business and pleasure
> pale, and I think I'm staring into space,
> I catch myself gazing at a notecard propped
> on my desk, "The Waves at Matsushima."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> and wider than the impossible journey
> from island to island so sheerly
> undercut by waves that no boot could find
> a landing, nor a shipwrecked couple
>
> rest beneath those scrubby pines at the top
> that could be overgrown heads of broccoli,
> even if they could survive the surf, tall
> combers, more like a field plowed by a maniac . . .

These line lengths seem determined mainly by their typographic width. Why else does the author break the lines between "pleasure" and "pale" or "tall" and "combers"? The apparently regular line breaks fall without any real rhythmic relation either to the meter or the syntax. As Truman Capote once said, "That's not writing—it's typing." There is no rhythmic integrity, only incompatible, provisional judgments shifting pointlessly line by line. The resulting poems remind me of a standard gag in improvisational comedy where the performers pretend to speak a foreign language by imitating its approximate sound. Making noises that resemble Swedish, Russian, Italian or French, they hold impassioned conversations on the stage. What makes it all so funny is that the ac-

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tors, as everyone in the audience knows, are only mouthing nonsense.

The metrical incompetence of pseudo-formal verse is the most cogent evidence of our literature's break with tradition and the lingering consequences. These poets are not without talent. Aside from its rhythmic ineptitude, their verse often exhibits many of the qualities that distinguish good poetry. Even their desire to try traditional forms speaks well for their ambition and artistic curiosity. How then do these promising authors, most of whom not only have graduate training in writing or literature but also work as professional teachers of writing, not hear the confusing rhythms of their own verse? How can they believe their expertise in a style whose basic principles they so obviously misunderstand? That these writers by virtue of their training and position represent America's poetic intelligentsia makes their performance deeply unnerving—rather like hearing a conservatory trained pianist rapturously play the notes of a Chopin waltz in 2/4 time.

These young poets have grown up in a literary culture so removed from the predominently oral traditions of metrical verse that they can no longer hear it accurately. Their training in reading and writing has been overwhelmingly visual not aural, and they have never learned to hear the musical design a poem executes. For them poems exist as words on a page rather than sounds in the mouth and ear. While they have often analyzed poems, they have rarely memorized and recited them. Nor have they studied and learned poems by heart in foreign languages where sound patterns are more obvious to non-native speakers. Their often extensive critical training in textual analysis never included scansion, and their knowledge of even the fundamentals of prosody is haphazard (though theory is less important than practice in mastering the craft of versification). Consequently, they have neither much practical nor theoretical training in the way sounds are organized in poetry. Ironically this very lack of training makes them deaf to their own ineptitude. Full of confidence, they rely on instincts they have never developed. Magisterially they take liberties with forms whose rudimentary principles they misconstrue. Every poem reveals some basic confusion about its own medium. Some misconceptions ultimately prove profitable for art. Not this one.

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6

In my own poetry I have always worked in both fixed and open forms. Each mode offered possibilities of style, subject, music, and development the other did not suggest, at least at that moment. Likewise experience in each mode provided an illuminating perspective on the other. Working in free verse helped keep the language of my formal poems varied and contemporary, just as writing in form helped keep my free verse more focused and precise. I find it puzzling therefore that so many poets see these modes as opposing aesthetics rather than as complementary techniques. Why shouldn't a poet explore the full resources the English language offers?

I suspect that ten years from now the real debate among poets and concerned critics will not be about poetic form in the narrow technical sense of metrical versus non-metrical verse. That is already a tired argument, and only the uninformed or biased can fail to recognize that genuine poetry can be created in both modes. How obvious it should be that no technique precludes poetic achievement just as none automatically assures it (though admittedly some techniques may be more difficult to use at certain moments in history). Soon, I believe, the central debate will focus on form in the wider, more elusive sense of poetic structure. How does a poet best shape words, images, and ideas into meaning? How much compression is needed to transform versified lines—be they metrical or free—into genuine poetry? The important arguments will not be about technique in isolation but about the fundamental aesthetic assumptions of writing and judging poetry.

At that point the real issues presented by American poetry in the eighties will become clearer: the debasement of poetic language; the prolixity of the lyric; the bankruptcy of the confessional mode; the inability to establish a meaningful aesthetic for new poetic narrative; and the denial of musical texture in the contemporary poem. The revival of traditional forms will be seen then as only one response to this troubling situation. There will undoubtedly be others. Only time will prove which answer is the most persuasive.

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HERBERT LOMAS

The Poetry of Ted Hughes

Ted Hughes's appointment as Poet Laureate in 1984, and Philip Larkin's death in September 1985, left Hughes as—in spite of some dubious connotations of the laureateship—the undoubted doyen of British poetry, which may or may not mean the best poet.

Hughes and Larkin were provocatively polarized by Al Alavarez in his influential, at the time often formative, anthology *The New Poetry* (Penguin, 1962). Larkin, while allowed elegance, was made, with slightly distorting emphasis, the exemplar of gentility:

> And gentility is a belief that life is always more or less orderly, people always more or less polite, their emotions and habits more or less decent and more or less controllable; that God, in short, is more or less good.

Alvarez was out to promote poets who confronted libido, the unconscious drives whose "public faces are those of the two world wars, of the concentration camps, of genocide, and the threat of nuclear war." He defined "a new seriousness" as comparable to that of psychoanalysis:

> One of the therapeutic purposes, for example, of Bruno Bettelheim's secret psychoanalytic observations when he was in Dachau and Buchenwald was to educate himself into realising how much of what went on around him expressed what went on inside himself. Another analyst has suggested that the guilt which seems to dog the refugees who escaped from Germany may in part be due to the fact that the Nazis fulfilled the deepest and most primitive drives of the refugees themselves, killing fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and children.

Hughes was singled out as attempting seriously to recreate and integrate such threatening constellations. His images

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"reach back, as in a dream, into a nexus of fear and sensation . . . part physical, part state of mind." Hughes was closer to Lowell, Berryman, Sexton and Plath than to his British contemporaries. America may, in fact, have been a stronger cultural influence on Hughes than Britain. Apart from working there and marrying Sylvia Plath, he has perhaps been formed more by Dickinson, Ransom, Eberhart, Moore, Cleanth Brooks, trickster tales and American anthropologists than by any British sources except Shakespeare, D.H. Lawrence and Robert Graves. Yet American readers do not seem to have grown up reading him as their British counterparts have.

As with any complex major poet, his work is full of contradictions, and his purport can be not what it seems, perhaps even to him. The critic has his own ambivalences to cope with — a blend of admiration and cultural uneasiness. Hughes's genuine popularity in England is based on his almost hallucinatory imagination, his enhanced and enhancing exact observation, his organ-voice, not always completely under control, like his subjectivity, and his resourceful, textured, hyperbolic verbal gift. The combat of the death wish and the biological spirit of survival he dramatizes seems almost diagnostic of the world's and can engage the reader like the sight of a fight for life in high seas. His poetry can seem like a lifeline; and Hughes's life as a shaman is certainly not a theoretical one. Poetry, says Hughes, "seizes upon what is depressing and destructive and lifts it into a realm where it becomes healing and energizing."[1]

Hughes came to fame through an American prize. Sylvia Plath submitted Hughes's *The Hawk in the Rain* (1957) to the Poetry Center of the YM-YWHA of New York, whose competition was for a first book, the prize being immediate publication by Harper. The judges—Auden, Spender and Marianne Moore—chose Hughes. It is still an interesting book, but this phase of Hughes's work, when he was still following New Critical principles, finds its perfection in *Lupercal* (1960), which contains some poems that look very good stayers. "An Otter," for instance, is affectionately and attentively perceived:

[1] *Ted Hughes and R.S. Thomas Read and Discuss Selections of Their Own Poems* (Norwich Tapes, Battle, Sussex, 1978).

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Underwater eyes, an eel's
Oil of water body, neither fish nor beast is the otter:
Four-legged yet water-gifted, to outfish fish;
With webbed feet and a long ruddering tail
And a round head like an old tomcat.

Yet, as with Lawrence, the studied observation is serving the anagogical. The otter is theriomorphic of Jung's "Self," the Hindu *Atman*, "Like a king in hiding"—like Lawrence's snake—an exile from an egocentric tainted world that hunts him out of existence and reduces him to "this long pelt over the back of a chair."

So the self under the eye lies,
Attendant and withdrawn.

Though disinherited, he is the legitimate pretender, inhabitant of two worlds, land and water, conscious and unconscious.

As well as absorbing *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, the young Hughes ingested Yeats. "Things Present," the first poem in *Lupercal*, picks up Yeats's image of man as a begger-man—for Yeats a prince, or son of God, wandered into the mire, or matter, and transformed into a ragged man or toad. Yet Hughes's *atman*, like his otter, will "revert to nothing at all": he is at once a fact and a mere dream in "the sodden ditch." The here and now are not the intersection of the timeless with time, but "A bare-backed tramp and a ditch without a fire." The tramp's progenitors, unlike the otter's, were *mere* survivors: dubious honor and hopelessly fearful hope were translated into the practical: shoes and a house, "A roof treed to deflect death," protective against the enemy nature. The tramp is less "man" than the disinherited ego of today.

For Hughes the dismissal of "nature," the loss of the paradisal egoless animal consciousness, which the shaman partially recovers, is man's original sin. Christianity is not, however, the solution but compounds the error: "treed to deflect death" is a sneer at the delusory offer of survival of death. Christ is a pernicious sublimation of sex, like other devotees of the spirit, Socrates, "complacent as a phallus," or Buddha:

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Visage of Priapus: the undying tail-swinging
Stupidity of the donkey
That carries Christ. How carefully he nurses

This six-day abortion of the Absolute.
"The Perfect Forms," *Lupercal*

The "facts" of Eden are revised:

No, the serpent did not
Seduce Eve to the apple.
All that's simply
Corruption of the facts.

Adam ate the apple.
Eve ate Adam.
The serpent ate Eve.
This is the dark intestine.

The serpent, meanwhile,
Sleeps his meal off in Paradise—
Smiling to hear
God's querulous calling.
"Theology," *Wodwo*, 1967

According to Ekbert Faas, admiring this reduction of myth to sexuality and ingestion—satisfied genitals and belly bring peace—Hughes only began to realize the full importance of "theology" when he began to write *Crow*.[2] Yet the poem hardly defines the early agony of Hughes's meditations on the devouring intestine.

The poet empathizes with the tramp in "Crag Jack's Apostasy," who has nightmares of cruel heads and talons: Jack "calls continually" "That I may see more than your eyes / In an animal's dreamed head," "Keep more than the memory / Of a wolf 's head, of eagles' feet." The eyes are the eyes of his god, renounced, but still there, buried under the weight of dark church stone: Jack's power and his luck have changed

[2] Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara, Calif., 1980), p. 78.

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since his apostasy, but he still prays to the abandoned god—for him not to appear in terrifying animal form. In the absence of the civilizing "art that doth mend nature," a vision like that of the bestial men and women in *King Lear* haunts the early Hughes. The title "A Modest Proposal" points, as with Swift, to human bestiality:

> There is no better way to know us
> Than as two wolves, come separately to a wood.
> *The Hawk in the Rain*, 1957

Each wolf would "sob contentment towards the moon" if he could devour the other, with "the red smelting of hatred" in his mouth, ready for the "slavering rush." Yet the contrasting hounds—civilized creatures—trained, leaping together, "making delighted sounds," are simply better organized devourers in the great lord's gorgeous hunt.

Though Hughes's poetry centers on animals, they are heavily anthropomorphized, are in fact excruciatingly lifelike masks: his pike has "the grin it was born with." Leonard Baskin's engraved Crow—Baskin, the American engraver, suggested the subject to Hughes—is, with its male human genitals, very apposite. Hughes visualizes animals as human beings peeping out of beaks and snouts: that is the horror: sub-human humans wolfing raw meat or being gorged, their appetites and agonies suffused with human consciousness. Contrariwise, Mozart's brain is unconvincingly compared to the shark's mouth. Hughes finds thrushes "terrifying":

> Triggered to stirrings beyond sense—with a start, a bounce,
> a stab
> Overtake the instant and drag out some writhing thing. . . .
>
> Is it their single-mind-sized skulls, or a trained
> Body, or genius, or a nestful of brats
> Gives their days this bullet and automatic
> Purpose? Mozart's brain had it, and the shark's mouth

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That hungers down the blood-smell even to a leak of
its own
Side and devouring of itself.

"Thrushes," *Lupercal*

The latter image clearly echoes that in *King Lear*: "Humanity must perforce prey on itself, / Like monsters of the deep"; and Hughes's language in this passage almost out-Shakespeares Shakespeare. Yet Shakespeare is testing a morality of sacrifice and suffering against this pre-Darwinian Darwinian vision: Hughes is on his way to the worship of "nature" proposed by Edmund—"Thou, Nature, art my goddess"—but rejected by the play. "Thrushes" ends with an image of man at his desk driven by the same attent purposefulness as the thrush, reinforced with the devils of his unconscious: beyond that nothing.

Hughes's "Hawk Roosting" thinks as no bird could:

It took the whole of Creation
To produce my foot, my each feather:
Now I hold Creation in my foot

Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly—
I kill where I please because it is all mine.
There is no sophistry in my body:
My manners are tearing off heads—

The allotment of death.

Lupercal

In verbalizing the dynamics of the hawk, Hughes has sketched a blueprint for tyranny.

When Hughes is not writing at his peak, disbelief can set in. Only human beings can imagine death and thus glory in it or worry about it: grazing deer, unsuccessfully attacked by a lion, bound off and start grazing again immediately: they don't go off their food or demand a whisky. Humans, in an emergency, may have a taste of animal fear—pure reflexes, adrenalin, cortisone—and find it ecstatically exhilarating; so much so that they seek to repeat the experience; or they find that they have been wounded but felt no pain. Blake writes:

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How do you know but ev'ry bird that cuts the airy way
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?

Is it not perhaps Hughes that is being sentimental, rather than Blake? At his worst, Hughes can seem like an inverted Disney. "Ghost Crabs" inhabit man and his history:

All night, around us or through us,
They stalk each other, they fasten on to each other,
They mount each other, they tear each other to pieces,
They utterly exhaust each other.
They are the powers of this world. . . .

They are the turmoil of history, the convulsion
In the roots of the blood, in the cycles of concurrence.
To them, our cluttered countries are empty battleground.

Wodwo

It would be unkind to quote these clichés if the poem had not been overpraised. Even with more closely zoomorphic imagery, a didactic, anti-romantic "pathetic fallacy" can distort his "Skylarks":

The lark begins to go up
Like a warning
As if the globe were uneasy—. . .

Leaden
Like a bullet
To supplant
Life from its centre. . . .

Crueller than owl or eagle

A towered bird, shot through the crested head
With the command, Not die

But climb
Climb
Sing
Obedient as to death a dead thing.

Wodwo

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Even if the bird is meaninglessly programmed to exert itself, the experience might seem exhilarating to it, surely—as horses clearly enjoy racing. A skylark is certainly anything but "leaden" or "like a bullet" or "crueller than owl or eagle." Shelley does not make the mistake of supposing the bird climbs out of a fear of death: only we "look before and after / And pine for what is not," whose "sincerest laughter / With some pain is fraught." Later in the poem Hughes does impersonate the action of the bird joyously—so successfully that he later added a new conclusion to correct the effect, comparing the skylark to Cuchulain, torturing himself erect to defy death.

Wodwo (1967), in spite of Hughes's apologists, is not Hughes at his best: it is adjectival, hyperbolic, verbose, often unconvincing, by no means an advance on *Lupercal*, which contains unforgettable writing. It's a relief after *Wodwo* to come to *Crow* (1970), with its new panache, humor, economy and playfulness. The "Trickster Tale," derived from primitive literatures, seems to have released Hughes from depression, or coincided with a release from depression, leading him to a more narrative, neat-statement poem, parabolic, making a single point as bleakly, lightly and obliquely as a nursery rhyme: perhaps too faux-naively for some tastes.

Jung, a large influence on Hughes, wrote an essay "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," seeing the trickster as the Shadow, an unconscious archetype incorporating the psyche's unacceptable traits, the opposite of those consciously deployed. Hughes himself has contrasted Trickster Literature with Black Comedy.[3] Black Comedy is the end of a cultural process, drawing on "animal despair" and "suicidal nihilism" that "afflict a society or an individual when the supportive metaphysical benefits disintegrate." Trickster Literature, on the contrary, comes at the beginning of a cultural process and draws on the "unkillable biological optimism that supports a society or individual whose world is not yet fully created, and whose metaphysical beliefs are only just struggling out of the dream stage." It seems likely, therefore, that *Crow* is this for Hughes, the new start after the breakdown. It is evident that the writing affected Hughes therapeutically, had a "physical

[3] Ted Hughes, "A Reply to My Critics," *Books and Issues*, No. 3-4, 1981.

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effect" on him, though he knows that this does not guarantee the worth of the poem on the page. But he sees the tale as archetypal and biological:

> At bottom, this is what the Trickster is: the optimism of the sperm, still struggling joyfully along after 150 million years. . . . His recurrent adventure is like a master plan, one of the deepest imprints in our nature, if not the deepest, and one of our most useful ideas. We use it all the time, quite spontaneously, like a tool, at every stage of our psychological recovery and growth.

Both Black Comedy and the Trickster Tale laugh at calamity:

> It is the difference between two laughters: one, bitter and destructive; the other zestful and creative, attending what seems to be the same calamity.

Laughter is a recurrent item in *Crow*. Laughter erupts at catastrophe:

> The meteorite crashes
> With extraordinarily ill-luck on the pram.

Violent and Dionysiac, it ends guiltily buttoning up "Like somebody the police have come for." A grin goes through horrific Francis Bacon-like metamorphoses—there is often a great similarity between Hughes and Bacon—before retiring into its final phase: the skull. A smile finally splits "an unlucky person's" face—

> And the crowd, shoving to get a glimpse of a man's soul
> Stripped to its last shame,
> Met this smile
> That rose through his torn roots
> Touching his lips, altering his eyes
> And for a moment
> Mending everything
>
> Before it swept out and away across the earth.

In "Criminal Ballad" a man who has suffered a chain of catastrophes cannot enjoy simple moments—the children playing

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in the garden—because he is haunted by machine guns and burning women. He finds himself like Macbeth:

> His hands covered with blood suddenly
> And now he ran from the children and ran through
> the house
> Holding his bloody hands clear of everything
> And ran along the road and into the wood
> And under the leaves he sat weeping
>
> Till he began to laugh

"God" is an illusory impotent excelsior: a fantasy of the cortex in retreat from the intestine. He has no idea how to give a soul to Adam and Eve. Crow solves the problem:

> Crow laughed.
> He bit the Worm, God's only son,
> Into two writhing halves.
>
> He stuffed into man the tail half
> With the wounded end hanging out.
>
> He stuffed the head half headfirst into a woman
> And it crept deeper and up
> To peer out through her eyes
> Calling its tail-half to join up quickly, quickly
> Because O it was painful.

"In the beginning was the Scream"—and blackness, not light. In a biological creation, Crow is inseparable from his Mother Nature, whom he savages with every device, especially science: but he can't escape: when he crashes on the moon he wakes and crawls out "Under his mother's buttocks." "God" tries to teach Crow the word "live," but every time Crow opens his mouth to utter it, some horror leaps out: first the shark, then man and woman, "And woman's vulva dropped over man's neck and tightened."

The trickster genre is an ancestor of the comic strip and can suggest it: the reductive shameless parody, the irresponsi-

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ble joke, are there to release the unrespectable Shadow. After world catastrophe, "Crow had to start searching for something to eat." Hearing the weeping of the grubs he is devouring, he trains himself to be deaf. In a world where battle-slaughter is so easy—"Too like potting a snooker-ball"—Crow looks everywhere for the black beast, except in himself. His communion meal is a matter of survival: he tears off a mouthful of God's carcass and finds himself strengthened. The serpent-power emerges from the atom-nucleus and melts men and women, but Crow survives: he grabs the serpent "by the slackskin nape, / Beat the hell out of it, and ate it."

Crow's development is hampered by his religion: he has abandoned the true Goddess, Nature, and whored after the false god, Christ: he has nailed together man and God:

> So man cried, but with God's voice.
> And God bled, but with man's blood.

"Crow's Undersong" hymns the fertile Goddess:

> She brings petals in their nectar fruits in their plush . . .
> She has come amorous it is all she has come for
> If there had been no hope she would not have come
> And there would have been no crying in the city
> (There would have been no city)

What kind of hope is there? Hughes evidently foresees a pretty catastrophic sort of hope—the kind of hope that for most of us would constitute a despair, an abdication. Hughes is undoubtedly influenced by myth here, the death-and-rebirth myth of the shaman, the hero, and the saint. Perhaps, with Lowell, he sees the world as a grandiose version of the psychotic patient—who may have to endure regression, psychic death and rebirth in order to resume growth. Crow will have to endure what Jung calls an *enantiodromia*: his conscious and unconscious must be turned upside down—the direction in which he is going must be reversed. Crow's "ego-system" has to be destroyed before he can experience "the spirit-dimension of his inner link with his Creator," as Hughes put it

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in a letter to Gifford and Roberts.[4] He must be born again, and that implies spiritual death. In "Truth Kills Everybody" Crow seizes Proteus—the world—and, since his understanding is so inadequate and his procedure so mistaken, the world responds by going through destructive and delusory metamorphoses until it finally becomes a hand grenade and "BANG! He was blasted to nothing."

Taking heaven by storm, unprepared and ignorant, he is destroyed, to appear again, the same Crow, yet not quite the same. Hughes explains:

> That he explodes is positive . . . Now nothing remains for him but what has exploded him—his inner link with his creator, a thing of spiritfire ("he that loses his life shall find it" etc.). This is Crow's greatest step forward. But he regresses and has to make it again and again, before his gain is finally consolidated in his union with his bride. . . .

That this is not merely about individual psychosis is made clear by a remark to Faas:[5] asked if "the first and second creation" were separated by nuclear war, Hughes replied:

> Yes, a complete abolition of everything that's been up to this point and Crow is what manages to drag himself out of it in fairly good morale.

I leave the reader to draw his own conclusions about this. I think that Hughes would assume that the nihilism is not in himself but in a planetary humanity that has driven itself insane through ego-centered rationalism: he is merely drawing the realistic conclusion, as perhaps a *rishi*, visualizing world-cycles, would.

> It's obviously a pervasive and deep feeling that civilisation has now disappeared completely. If it's still here by grace of pure inertia and chance, and if the whole thing has essentially vanished, one had better have one's spirit invested in something that will not vanish. And this is shifting your foundation to completely new Holy Ground, a new divinity, one that won't be under the rubble when the churches collapse.

[4] Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (London, 1981), p. 256.

[5] Ekbert Faas, p. 207.

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Perhaps Hughes still hopes that catastrophe can be averted through the creation of poetic death-and-rebirth rituals. Perhaps the imaginative enactment of a psychotic episode will be a healing force. At any rate in *Gaudete* (1977) he has dramatized such a psychotic episode. In this Gothic dream-narrative, delivered with a scarifying waking realism, it is no accident that the protagonist is a clergyman: this makes him—Lumb, a sacrificial lamb—not only a deluded Christian, and therefore a ruined human being, but a representative of the whole deluded Christian tradition. He will go through a "conversion into his opposite," an *enantiodromia*: his unconscious becomes conscious, his conscious unconscious, and he embarks on the process Jung calls individuation, where, in a psychotic development, the Self replaces the ego.

The title refers ironically to the Virgin in a Christmas hymn of 1582.

> *Gaudete, gaudete, Christus est natus*
> *Ex Maria virgine, gaudete.*

This rebirth will involve a debauch.

In the streets of his town, now a town of corpses, Lumb is abducted "by spirits into the other world." There he finds the Goddess, Nature, an animal-woman, half-dead. She is to be revived. Lumb is crucified, whipped and spread-eagled beneath a bull, while its "Half a ton of guts / Balloon out and drop on Lumb." Fighting in "the roping hot mass," he is having his nose rubbed in the facts of the body. His double is now born, to replace him, into the vicarage he has left. This id-Lumb, made out of a log, takes his place as clergyman, organizes the women of the parish into a coven, and proceeds to copulate with all of them—encouraging them to believe that one of them will parturiate with the Messiah. Most of the book is a dramatization of these copulations. Jealousies among both the women and the men lead him to be hunted to death like an animal. The original Lumb now appears, roaming the west of Ireland. He shows three girls a "miracle": making a call with lips and back of hand, he summons an otter out of a lough: it is presumably both beast and emblem of the "self" that "under the eye lies"—the "king in hid-

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ing" of *Lupercal*. The girls tell their priest what has happened, bringing Lumb's notebook, which contains hymns to "a nameless female deity," Graves's White Goddess. The priest goes into an ecstasy of wonder at the creation—and proceeds to copy out Lumb's verses.

This follows the tragic scheme of death and regeneration, of course. But Keith Sagar's claim that *Gaudete* is preeminent among poetic works in our time[6] is unconvincing, to say the least. The incidents are engineered to loose scenes of "sex and violence." Scenes of healing and insight are replaced by the otter-incident and the anthology of hymns presented at the end. How Lumb's enlightenment evolves is a mystery: Sagar claims it happens in the "spirit world"—but all we are *shown* in the spirit world is the slaughterhouse scene. Perhaps log-Lumb represents the id that must be destroyed before a feeling for the sacred can be released in humanity. Perhaps the events are intended as a katharsis of repressed shadow forces for Lumb and the reader, both to be left "all passion spent" at the end; but the scenes are too grotesque for assent, let alone empathy: one watches as if at a horror movie. The wooden debauch of the log-Lumb destroys the community, if it were not already destroyed by its caricaturish stereotyping, whereas a shaman is supposed to heal his community. It is uncertain whether we are to take the priest's reaction at the end seriously—it is hard to do so. Sagar, who thinks Hughes has outflanked Lawrence, Beckett and Eliot, writes:

> The orthodox religious/mystical answers won't stand up. In *The Four Quarters* they are vacuous, the product of desperation and repudiation.

But the words apply more to *Gaudete* than to Eliot. Even *The Waste Land* enacts spiritual thirst and refreshment: fertility in sex and work depend on a prior regeneration through the Word. *Gaudete* enacts a barren priapic extravaganza, the physicality without charm, tenderness or love, and ends, such passion spent, in a bogus peace that passeth all understanding. It advertises the violence it portrays and recreates the horrors we recoil from in primitive religion.

[6] Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 225.

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Hughes has invented a new religion for himself out of a farrago of Robert Graves's slightly crazed vision of a White Goddess—a religiose sanctification of Darwinian birth, copulation and death, crying "kill, kill, kill"—Jung, the Sufism of Idries Shah, Carlos Castaneda, the *Bardo Thödol*, and shamanism as presented in Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell, among others. Shamanism, with its spiritualistic flight and return, centered on a symbolism of animal familiars, can seem to survive the supposed demise of the higher religions. The spirit world can be half-psychologized as the unconscious and half-left-open as potentially a metaphysical domain. The shaman imagery can be seen as a mode of accommodation to the facts of biological sex and death, a way of reinterpreting ourselves as primates, and adapting emotionally. There is no doubt of Hughes's commitment to his beliefs and his emotional participation in them: the poetry gives every evidence of a struggle for intellectual and spiritual survival. He chooses his themes because they offer "a good outcome for me personally."[7] This is no chic application of anthropology. Yet it is worrying. He is the legitimate successor of D.H. Lawrence: he sees the thrust of Western civilization and technology, together with its Christianity, as a cosmic mistake. Hope, of a cosmic sort, lies in a return to Mother Nature. This seems to me a bourgeois trap, the one Lawrence, in spite of his greatness, fell into as did Robert Graves. The technological development of man is an outgrowth of his spirit and is as endemic to man as "instinct," or innate knowledge, is to other animals. Without the machine, which starts with the stone and the wheel, there would be no "man," who invents or imitates but has no "instincts" to speak of. We must get control of our technology, obviously, and make it serve *us*. There is no way "back" to nature.

As Nietzsche wrote, "Every great philosophy is a species of involuntary autobiography." So is every poem and every statement, even the trivial one: the scientist who claims "a human being is a gene's way of producing another gene" is making an unverifiable primitivistic testimony: he is expressing an anti-human preference. It is possible to "believe in"

[7] "And I was conscious too that the overall theme (*Crow*) offered a good outcome for me personally" ("A Reply to My Critics").

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evolution and accept that we are advanced primates without accepting every current interpretation of evolution, especially the nineteenth-century one, which is in the philosophical domain. Dealing with the philosophical, the theological and the things that can be neither proved nor disproved, perhaps, as Wittgenstein thought, the great poets we have inherited are not so easily outflanked.

The English poet who has most influenced Hughes's style is Shakespeare, and this is unusual: most English poets, with the possible exception of Keats, have sheered off from what has often seemed a magnificently successful but inimitable baroque conglomerate. Hughes expertly seized what he could handle. Shakespeare's language, he wrote,[8] has

> the air of being invented in a state of crisis, for a terribly urgent job, a homely spur-of-the-moment improvisation out of whatever verbal scrap happens to be lying around, and this is exactly what real speech is. The meaning is not so much narrowly delineated as overwhelmingly suggested, by an inspired signalling and hinting of verbal heads and tails both above and below precision, and by this weirdly expressive underswell of a musical near-gibberish, like a jostling of spirits. The idea is conveyed, but we also receive a musical and imaginative shock, and the satisfaction of that is unfathomable.

Much of this is applicable to Hughes. In his interpretation of Shakespeare he is less happy: he sees Shakespeare's vision as like his own; but Shakespeare, he thinks, lost this reductive insight in coming to see "nature" as "the foul witch Sycorax." Yet in Shakespeare there are two conflicting "natures." There is Edmund's nature, a Goddess that leads men and women to behave like tigers or sharks: this is *natura naturata*, "nature natured," or the created universe. And there is "Great Creating Nature," *natura naturans*, or the transcendent that becomes immanent. Yet another "nature," *human* nature, is a unique creation; and gardening is an exemplar of its civilization in:

> 'Tis an art that doth mend nature, change it rather,
> But the art itself is nature.
>
> *The Winter's Tale*

[8] Ted Hughes, "Introduction" to *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse*.

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The Goddess of Nature will not do. Even "savages" are not "natural." Wordsworth's primitivistic reading of peasants was corrected by Coleridge: their wisdom derived not from nature but from intensive education by parents and clergy: nurture. Even Wordsworth, of course, did not worship "the vegetable universe," as Blake supposed (not having had the opportunity to read *The Prelude*). Wordsworth worshipped "the Wisdom and Spirit of the universe," whose presence mountains and lakes made him aware of:

> Thou soul that art the eternity of thought,
> That givest to forms and images a breath
> And everlasting motion.
>
> *The Prelude*, I. 401

Eliot, not in my opinion "outflanked" by Hughes, also recommended "a shifting of your foundations to completely new Holy Ground," to quote Hughes again. In "Thoughts After Lambeth" (1931) Eliot wrote:

> The World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the world from suicide.

These, like all human conceptions, are speculative, but so are the Freudian and Jungian semiologies; and all scientific hypotheses are provisional. I have suggested that in bypassing important dimensions, Hughes has been led to a Manichaean, reductive and provisionally-based anthropology. But of course this is his strength: he could argue that he has resorted, in a rage for the truth, to the biological, psychological and anthropological sources of all religions. Rejecting Christianity, he has rediscovered original sin, the ineradicable black beast that Crow looks everywhere for except in himself. As Bruno Bettelheim sought himself in the concentration camps, Hughes has sought himself in the animal kingdom—and presented humanity to us in the form of a bestiary. He has rediscovered the Fall in man's retreat from his biological reality. He has rediscovered death and resurrection and dramatized

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them in Crow's shattering search for a new inner relation to his creator, and in the adventures of Lumb in the spiritual and material worlds. In all this he has been inquiring implicitly and explicitly into the horrors of our phase of history. And certainly we need a new respect for creation.

He must be judged by the standards we apply to a major poet: the scale of his work, the assault on our culture, the threatened and threatening life-and-death commitment, the imaginative and verbal resources all demand this. He has attempted to be as representative, diagnostic and therapeutic as *The Waste Land*. He has not been uniformly successful. He has written a handful of poems that are likely to be read as long as English poetry is read. Most of these are justly famous and many to be found in *Lupercal*: "Hawk Roosting," "Pike," "An Otter," "The Bull Moses," "View of a Pig," "Thrushes," "Esther's Tomcat," "To Paint a Water Lily." I'm inclined to think the success of *Lupercal* was because Hughes's energy and preference for overstatement were disciplined by the example and precepts of Ransom and the New Critics. There are many other fine poems, in the less finished *Hawk in the Rain*, the depressed *Wodwo*, and in the poems written after *Gaudete*. *Crow* is a brilliant, flawed *tour de force*, *Gaudete* a scarcely mitigated miscalculation, not unconnected with Hughes's monomania. It would be very surprising if Hughes did not surprise us again, with a masterpiece, in spite of the astounding disasters of his poet-laureate poems.

Hughes is on a big psychic adventure, and it is impossible not to respond to the excitement this generates. It is a traditional symptom of "genius" to fail, sometimes in the bulk of the work, in "taste," through what Lawrence called "wholehoggedness." If Hughes's sinkings seem partly the ebullition of genius, partly intellectual vulgarity, partly an intermittent coarsening of a wounded and exquisite sensibility, partly a limitation of the spirit, his work is never insipid or tedious.

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NEAL BOWERS

Space Burial

> So the darkness comes on, covering the graves and the withered cedar and the nameless dead. Lights wink on around the sound. Rats stir in the weeds, among the graves. The smoke still ascends in the night, clean and without guilt, borne like passion with the last dust of the nameless and the unremembered, upward and upward, toward the stars.
>
> —William Styron, *Lie Down in Darkness*

Hallstatt, Austria

Though I followed a girl named Eva there,
into a travel poster town of tile roofs
and windowboxes of geraniums,
saying "Liebling" badly, saying
"Ich liebe dich" like a pick striking cement,
losing her for a want of softness, thinking
I would die from an anemia of language,
I kept on living, and my heart
learned how to store the untranslatable,
the dreams she leads me through
in my middle years, still wordless
along the narrow streets of Hallstatt,
up the mountainside, my Beatrice,
always ending at the bone house
dark behind the church, where generations
lie stacked like ivory, making room
for new tenants in the congregated ground.
From that high place the lake is visible,
deep among mountains and cold to look at.

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Gainesville, Florida

In this marshland
where basements are impossible,
graves must be small wells, filling
as soon as they are dug, each coffin
making a little splash at the end of its descent.
Still, the voice on the phone offers
one free plot in Cypress View
if I will buy the second;
and I hear myself saying I have no plans
to die in Florida, surprised to find
I have decided to die in Tennessee,
pushed by genes or pulled by the compass
neatness of ending where I began.
But that would take some planning,
old man hooked up to oxygen,
holding on in midair over forests or water
or gasping down the interstate, lights flashing,
nurse telling the medic to hurry.

To think of death far from the chosen ground
is to imagine the self as baggage, forklifted
into a boxcar or a jet's cargo hold
where air isn't needed and the cold can't hurt,
or tilted onto the back seat of a limousine
for the long cross-country trip, the driver
singing to himself and smoking, stopping
now and then on some deserted stretch to urinate.

Clarksville, Tennessee

My father could remember rowing
over what is now a shopping mall,
all the way to Franklin Street downtown
and the door of the Roxy Theatre.

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The high trestle was submerged
and hills rose up like whales
about to break the surface, dark shapes
barely visible through water thick with silt.
But that was before the dam,
before whole towns upstream were moved—
everything from schools to cemeteries,
the living and the dead.
They dug them out in crews of two,
each man taking his turn with the red soil,
spading, speaking only of the heat,
until the sun went down and the day's
stacked work was strapped to flatbeds,
hauled away in a second cortege
through the deserted town, no extra cost,
no ceremony, engines whining into distance.

Ames, Iowa

Some country graveyards disappear in August,
islanded in a flood of corn rushing
up on every side, as if the farmer decided
at the final moment to veer off
and not plow through, fearing death
more than he reveres life, still thinking
land should never be surrendered to the dead,
knowing the true Iowan would choose to be
plowed and harrowed, turned under in spring
earth moist and dark as pumpernickel,
to lie with the kernel of corn, the soybean seed
splitting its skin, reaching roots deep for the heart.

Those of us not born into this feeling must
stop the car on deserted country roads,
walk into tall fields among starched leaves,
lose direction, wait.

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Earth Orbit

My parents, in their modesty, bought space
in a highrise mausoleum, midway between
Prayer Level at the bottom and Faith at the top,
said it felt good to know where they would spend
eternity—fireproof, bombproof, safe from floods
and earthquakes, lying at Hope Level, halfway up.
Not for them the final ostentation, death's marble
penthouse.

Oh, Mother and Father, believe me when I say
dying is humility enough; infinity knows no frugality.
You should have splurged, spent all you had
on sixty million years; signed the longterm lease
and let them load you like a bullet
in the chamber of a gun, fire you at the universe,
high above this ground marked nightly by the monumental
moon.

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For the Piano Tuner

He deserves something better than money
for making the wires waver
like sitars or ring keen as thin glass.
Again and again his wrench twists each note
higher, and again a little higher,
and again, until the voice begins to test itself
against the tightening steel and the throat
feels the awful stress of music, the strain
of each perfect sound held waiting,
as if without effort, the way a small stem
holds its heavy flower,
the room filling with sprays and bouquets,
cups humming on their hooks in the pantry,
everything testing its pitch—pictures, and
windowpanes, the silverware in its muffled case—
the whole house coming into tune
as he finishes by playing something new,
something he says he just made up,
and I begin to dance.

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MICHAEL KELLOGG

The Squirrel's Heartbeat: Some Thoughts on the Later Style of Henry James

Teddy Roosevelt dismissed Henry James as "an effete and miserable snob." HJ returned the compliment by classifying his distinguished contemporary as a "dangerous jingo." The superficial insight and profound injustice of both views should surprise no one. The two men were bound to misunderstand one another, just as Sarah Pocock and Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors* had no common ground on which to meet. Indeed, the difficulties engendered by such meetings between American forces of nature and European—whether home-grown or naturalized—refinements form a recurring theme in James's works.

Although James could accurately depict the American *type*, it is clear, despite some early sympathetic if wooden portraits—Christopher Newman in *The American* and Casper Goodwood in *The Portrait of a Lady*, for example—that he was in the end wholly of the opposite camp. And the sneaking sympathy we feel with TR's assessment of James is directly linked to a frustration with James's hyper-refinement of both matter and manner. We long at times for a Roosevelt to burst onto the scene of one of James's later novels, particularly *The Golden Bowl*, and disperse the swirls of obscurity by calling a spade, at last, a spade.

Nothing, of course, would be resolved by calling Charlotte a slut, the Prince a cad, Maggie a simpering fool, and Adam Verver an amiable nonentity; nothing, that is, but our craving for exact labels. And it is precisely this craving that James, in his later works, steadfastly refuses to satisfy. For such labels, once applied, free us from further thought about their subjects. They sum them up and dismiss them, as TR, in character, and HJ, in a rare lapse, summed up and dismissed one another.

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An aversion to simplistic assessment is the hallmark of the later James. It is, therefore, surprising to find even such perceptive readers as Leon Edel and Gore Vidal subscribing to the conventional wisdom that James's later style was dictated, literally, by his acquisition of a typewriter and amanuensis.[1] On this view, he simply started to write as he talked and James was, by all accounts, a most elliptical talker. But the studied indirection of James's later style and the harmony of that style with James's mission as an artist—as he came finally to understand it—belie such an unselfconscious, that is inartistic, account. Vidal, in particular, has carelessly dismissed as incidental (if not unfortunate) what is in fact James's supreme achievement.

Common speech is a well-worn path from which our thoughts and feelings too seldom stray. Our words for things, by their very familiarity and the ease with which we apply them, become substitutes in a sense for perceiving the things themselves. Or, at least, they make it easy not to perceive too closely or to distinguish too finely. Yet close perception and fine distinction are the essence of James's art. So if language is a grid that we impose upon experience in what his brother William called "the mind's act of self-defense against universal drift and decay," then HJ is determined to break the resultant gridlock and work his way or even drift, if he must, to a newer, fresher vantage point.

The theme of James's later novels is the tragedy of the commonplace; not the pompous sputtering tragedy of visible disaster, but the hidden and largely silent tragedy of the human spirit in its most homely conditions. It is a theme that cannot be handled directly because of the familiarity of the objects of study. They are too encrusted with our ordinary ways of speaking and, hence, thinking about them. Familiarity may not breed contempt, but it does dull perception. George Eliot made the point most beautifully in *Middlemarch*.

> That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had

[1] See Leon Edel, *Henry James: A Life* (New York, 1985), p. 456; Gore Vidal, "Introduction to *The Golden Bowl*" (Penguin, 1985), p. 9 (first printed in *The New York Review of Books*, Jan. 19, 1984 issue).

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> a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.

James's art, then—in search as it is of "that element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency"—is supremely one of indirection. He works not so much with words as around them, seeking the felt quality of everyday experience which is masked by coarse abstractions. What may appear as an old-maidish fastidiousness in his refusal to speak plain is in fact a courageous groping toward that "keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life" of which Eliot speaks.

James explores the human sensibility layer by layer, as if he were peeling off the concentric coats of an onion—each thinner and more delicate than the last—unbeguiled by the prospect of some simple, easily grasped core. The effect of his later style, with its endless qualifications and intimations, is to aid in that exploration by slowing us down, by preventing our slapping familiar labels on things and then rushing on. It brings us round to things by novel routes and presents them from striking angles. It forces us to listen, to see, and to take account.

In the process, we may lose our bearings and be unable to decide, for example, whether Lambert Strether is reaching towards insight or fumbling in obscurity. But struggling with that uncertainty is fundamental not only to Strether's character, but also to our own task as readers. The clarity for which James strives appears obscure, we might say, because it refuses to be satisfied with what ordinarily passes for clarity and is in fact the most resistant because unnoticed form of obscurity.

Needless to say, however, James's later style is not unproblematic. As he himself said in an essay on *Middlemarch*, "the greatest minds have the defects of their qualities."[2] James's prose is rather like the golden bowl itself, richly gilded but covering a grave flaw.

[2] James made a similar remark following a first meeting with Churchill. It was, he said, "a very encouraging experience to meet that young man. It had brought home to me very forcibly—very vividly—the *limitations* by which men of genius obtain their ascendency over mankind."

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The inherent limitation of James's method, and of the prose which is allied with that method, lies in the truth of Eliot's statement: even the quickest of us do go about "well wadded with stupidity." We lead, of necessity, rather superficial lives. We do not, cannot organize those lives around discriminations too subtle to be communicated directly. Even if our experience has depth in some areas—and that is no insignificant achievement—we must be content in the others, where the requisite intensity cannot be sustained, to pass smoothly on, buoyed by common speech and common judgments. As a result, quarrying of the sort that James does into the commonplace facts of a human life, will repay the effort only in limited areas. Only certain aspects of the lives of certain types of characters are intricate enough to sustain a Jamesian analysis.

Much of the world of action, which thrives on superficialities, is therefore excluded by James's technique. Paste-on labels for things set the stage for action. They provide the confident backdrop necessary for vigorous activity, and without them we cannot "get on." It is the refusal or inability to traffic in such labels that leads to the near paralysis of the Jamesian hero. Thus, Lambert Strether cannot, will not see—until it is directly thrust upon him—the "hard realities," as Woollett might say, of Chad's relations with Madame de Vionnet. Strether sees, rather, the extent to which Chad has been polished and enriched by that relationship. And he sees Madame de Vionnet in all her charm and desperation. Strether is entranced by the deeper, but more elusive, reality of the "virtuous attachment" promised him by Little Bilham.

Sarah Pocock, by contrast, is able to swoop down and collect her too willing prize with a vigor worthy of TR precisely because she sees nothing but the sordid liaison. Strether feels the tragedy of Madame de Vionnet. Sarah Pocock knows nothing but the melodrama of "saving" Chad, a drama in which Strether has miserably failed to play his part.

In *The Golden Bowl* only two actions are directly and vividly portrayed: the kiss of Charlotte and the Prince in Part I and the shattering of the golden bowl by Fanny Assingham in Part II. These two actions, in their ringing clarity, reverberate throughout the novel. They are endlessly dissected and ana-

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lyzed. All their causes and consequences are exposed. The result is fascinating; but human life, we must insist, consists largely of doing, not of thinking about doing. What James said of Maggie—"Her grasp of appearances was out of proportion to her view of causes"—can be turned on its head and applied to him. James's view of causes is out of proportion to his grasp of appearances. Or, as Marian Hooper Adams more pithily put it: "Henry James chewed more than he bit off."

Since most of us have not time for endless rumination on the springs of conduct, James is also restricted in his cast. He must create for his principal characters persons who are plausibly articulate about the subtle shadings of the spirit, and who have sufficient leisure to be preoccupied with such things. Sarah Pocock doesn't merit much attention because her consciousness isn't rich enough. She is too easily played out, existing as she does on the surface of things and at home as she is in the world of action.

James's style culminates in *The Golden Bowl*, his most perfect and most limited work. The lack of a Sarah Pocock to intervene as *deus ex machina* at last permits him to play out his hand fully, with a fully Jamesian cast. The beauty and poignancy of the analysis are unsurpassed in literature. But one cannot escape a distinct distaste for the idleness, the vacuity of each of the four major characters. Their endless subtleties and amoral refinements ultimately leave us cold.

When we act we do so admittedly on the illusion of simplicity. But we do act, because we haven't the luxury of constantly playing Hamlet. Yet we need not be as insensitive as Sarah Pocock. There is a balance to be struck and our life as moral beings is a search for that balance. One feels that James, in his horror of coarse simplicity, badly missed the middle ground. The resultant paradox is that one of the greatest students of human nature, to reverse a remark he made about Dickens, understood man but not men.

No writer ever listened harder for the squirrel's heartbeat than Henry James. That is his greatness and his limitation.

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JOHN HAINES

From *Death and the Miser*

after the painting by Hieronymus Bosch

The dream within the acorn,
still green at the heart
of the forest, had more substance
than that closet-sleep of yours,
shut in by more than
natural earth and lumber.

Your rents and your reckonings,
meticulous in subtraction;
your ledger locked at nightfall,
as if all life's guilty
confusion were cancelled
by that sleeve-worn shelving
and quiet turn of a key.

From soil of soot and paper,
the sand you sifted over
the blotting ink of your days,
came neither fruit nor flower,
nothing feathered but a pen,
nor wind-shaken whisper
above the arid rustling
of your thumbed, exacting pages.

There, by candle or fretted sun,
you might have seen, as now,
flickering and doubled by fever,
your shadow-self at work,
cowled and booted,
and with great butcher's shears
slitting the rose of mercy
into a thousand tatters.

*

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You would never willingly wear
the clothing of the dead,
nor touch their flesh, soured
and damp and printed with leaves.

And yet each day you have filed
and sorted the claims of death,
cut paper death in the morning,
signed ink death in the evening.

The list of death:

Ledger-death and curtain-death.
The death that studies,
that sits in chairs and stands
at counters:
Death the receiver.

Death in a rented cassock: cleric
and lender, the ape of stations.
And early each morning he offers
to the cold knees of penury
his wafer-death and credit-death.

For death is a shadow-priest
leaning at his slotted window;
no more than a voice, sabbath-
darkened, whispering of penance
and absolution:
Death the confessor.

And death is waiting overhead;
he coughs, spits in the sand-wake
of voices receding. The last
of the spilled earth falls, and soon
the gardener's tread, crisp
and single on the unraked leaves:

Death the warden.

Death the keeper.

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*

Believe in the angel beside you,
his patient and willing gesture:

(Death with a letter
to be delivered)

Believe in the cross, whose wood
is tinder, whose nails are rust:

(Death with a fiery pencil
will pierce you)

Believe in the light blown forward
from the darkness behind you:

(Death with a windy
lantern will find you)

Believe in the rote of numbers
chirped from the cloister at evening:

(Death with the reed of the
vesper sparrow is calling)

Remember: God surely sees us . . .
He rocks and smokes in his office:

(Death in a quiet slipper
will open the door)

*

So much leaden weight,
so much desire turned inward.

To follow without hope
of turning, the animal-reek
of one's own track . . .

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And no one to call you back
from its steep momentum—
into the black rain
of ink, the fury of hurled
buttons and fiery quills.

And of the self-mounted
lashed to a standstill,
you too will know their anguish,
their late remorse,
who from the rank spring
of their hearts drink thirst,
only to drink again.

As yoked and branded cattle,
stunned with the blood
of the killing-floor,
they know the yelp and cutting
rein of the deputies
who ride there—masters
of pain, tyrants of the split
hoof and cloven brow.

The Sleepwalkers

And the time that was given
to Egypt was Sleep,
and they who walked there
were called the *Sleepwalkers.*

Strode on through burning dust
in the blue-fired glaze of summer,
through unfailing flood,
through sandstorm and sunstroke.

To be, to sleep, to awaken . . .
that was the gift of an insect.

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With the glittering eye of a hawk
and the beak of an ibis,
with the rasping tongue of a dog;

but stronger than any of these,
the law of drift and silence
overheard through reed-whispers
and unstilled barking.

Twilight, the one returning kingdom,
vaster than daybreak,
the unroofed temple where scribe
and monkey-priest sorted the strings
of birds; on a thread of smoke
the clay spirit climbed,
born of the light and the lotus.

And then, in the green heart
of stone, to sleep at last.
Among the restless, the sun-driven,
to be the one cured and stationed
man: Lord of the death-watch.

And night was a cobra, coiled
in the doubled knot of eternity;
symmetrical in sleep,
but steeped in poison, waiting
for the first king to wake.

Head of Sorrow, Head of Thought

You would think that no one
had the right to so much
distance and calm.

And yet how often do we see,
clouded and still,

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the face of someone gone
out of himself
into stone or water?

The rider in the train,
escaped into the glass fields;
the watcher in the garden,
changed once to a leaf,
now to the cold light on a pond.

Face of the storm, we say,
we have faced you,
heard you howling within,
quelling the atoms
of a bruised, exacting heart . . .

She, who out of the tempest
came to this calm,
gazing as if from a distance
made equally of granite and cloud.

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JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

Another Autumn

The south wind blows steadily from the river,
overtakes me in a fancy of flight;
it startles the ashes of the dead
on the riverbank, flutters the thin maps
in the map seller's hand, it presses open
the gleaming canopies of the festival,
and gasps among the old, mossed stones. From here
I can see the wind moving the bracken,
moving so fiercely that it blurs all thought,
tracks of a season. And this my room
which preserves each ulterior motive,
my notebooks and radio signals I presume upon;
where my feet easily slip into and out of my shoes
but where the wind can speak no farther
and be a measure of an aroma
that once held a flower's soul.

Here, while everything stands still
to make me tremble to old post cards I received once,
I watch myself looking out of the window
at a fallen branch, from my room, past the map seller,
toward someone who could call out my name
and come in, to drown me again
in those songs of pain and loss, to make me cry
like my father's child, and find
ultimately that thoughtless corner where moss waits
patiently to appear
in the cracks of a dream's walls.
But I can hear no song now, feeling
my eyelids close, as the wind comes and goes;
as hair thins and hardens,
and emptiness echoes from the ashes of truth;
as wind, map and river are swallowed

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by the trajectories of daylight,
and my need to have you is only caught
in the design for a poem I have been working on.

Autumn is here again, my hand trembles
to the wind, but you are not responsible,
you are not what you seem;
like an unknown horoscope which pushes one
against a wall, absent lover—
perhaps only a fear of some memory
that has no further use for gentleness or remorse,
as the wind elsewhere
nudges your yearning skin with long cool fingers.

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VINAY DHARWADKER

Sunday at the Lodi Gardens

—New Delhi, 1978

A week's irritations
erupted after lunch that day.
I snapped at her suddenly,
and when her eyes flared
I turned and walked out,
slamming the door hard
as I went down the stairs.

The sun had been merciless
all week long outside.
In the deserted market square
I stopped to smoke a cigarette,
and stood in the shade
of a sagging awning,
cursing the dust and sweat,

then took a bus north
to the neem-shaded boulevards
and crossed into the gardens,
where I sat staring emptily
at stalks of dry grass,
the domes in the distance
hunched among the trees.

The afternoon was littered
with peels and cigarette butts,
the faint cries of children,
pairs of lovers grieving
in patches of shade,
young men idling
under the motionless leaves.

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As the sun sloped down,
the black mouths of the tombs
spat out streams of birds
that shrieked across the evening,
and then the final glow of dusk
smothered the air,
and the day came to nothing.

TRENT BUSCH

Clytemnestra at the Palace Wall

Tell me what sins he did
not commit. Let's start with
one pretty one nudged a
windless dawn to shiny death
to please an impish goddess.

For what? Did I not know
better than anyone
the tramp the dullard his
aging brother could not
in peacetime keep at home?

Listen to pleas? He heard
no one, licensed to sail
and kill and carouse with
anyone his new-gained
generalship could win.

With trinkets and baubles,
with beard soft and black and

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assuring, he seduced
all of my own toward
a hatred deeper than blood.

And that other one, her
sluttish face brown, hair bleached
lying the afternoon
deck the months coming home,
her nightly comforting.

See the whore! down the foolish
streets of Argos, arguing,
bracelets torn from her arms
as she is cast into
the crowd, the smile on his wide

face as he climbs the marble
steps, hands raised and turning,
his dark head streaked with gray,
that has grown no wiser,
that will grow no older.

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JEROME MAZZARO

Off Naxos

No longer buffeted like boats in narrows
between islands, we take a steadier course
from the land's distinctive shapes
and contours. We keep in sight
the harbor's angular white homes and churches
layered like separate bands above the sea—
thin narrows through which our gazes move.

Much as those ancient fires bringing news
of peace from isle to isle to mainland,
or those embers which,
after their uncontrollable first bursts,
women bring into a settled heat,
the months bring to our natures
strengths like those of song or fired clay.

Segmented and discrete as patterns on a vase,
the makeshift days and selves fan out.
Neither Mykonos nor Patmos, this island—
glorious in plants, ample in game—
breathes only present smells. Our thoughts
push on, defying easy comprehension,
hugging for life the roiling gaps between.

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BRUCE BAWER

A Letter to Cambridge

to S.E.B.

This is just to let you know
that every night I lie awake in bed,
my mind feverishly full of you,
and only fall asleep exhaustedly
when the sky begins to lighten
outside my window, and birds sing.

So riven are we from one another
this long year, it's hard to believe
you're really there, in Cambridge,
following some mysterious pike,
the one road of your life, while I
bear your year-old memory down

this lonely road of mine, which
grows stranger daily, and look up
every so often to see the memory
growing stranger too. That's
the most painful thing of all—
to see memory yield to the mind's

daily perversions, and the mind
unable to desist. Have you seen it,
how time folds fancy into memory?
I'd never noticed it before.
Now that I have, though, I realize
that none of us dies all at once.

From the moment that a moment
enters the memory, it begins
to feed on fantasy and fear.

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Memory mixes with desire, never
to be divorced. The past cannot
move into the present uncorrupted.

That is why I reach out to you now,
not as a beloved, myth-laced memory,
but as a friend, estranged, in Cambridge.
Please do not think me tiresome
for troubling you with memory. I ask
nothing of you but a moment's thought.

GEOFFREY GARDNER

Annual

What you see is what your world
contains. Nothing else is there.
What it means lies in the angle
from which you look, perspective reaps
both the story and its moral.
It is early August. The deaths
that came dividing years are now
the single fact of a week, grief
through a long moment of regret,
sorrow, from waking to sleeping
and on into waking again,
for what was and what might have been
and what never can be again.
At week's end, a bittern startles
in the meadow, calls once and flies
off north, the story in his beak,
ended now for another year.

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Putting a Little Orange in Their Life

FOUR YEARS AFTER THE DEATH of its founder and stylistic architect, George Balanchine, the New York City Ballet is beginning to show signs of transition, and Peter Martins' new *Ecstatic Orange* may be a portent of the company's future course. Much as the NYCB's fans would like to see it preserved forever in a state of peak Balanchinian classicism, no one has yet discovered how a ballet company can be arrested and held in one performing mode. Subtle signs of change were everywhere during the NYCB spring season, even in the audience. The group of regulars who used to occupy the left-hand corner of the upper lobby at intermissions has diminished noticeably, and a new kind of patron, not very knowledgeable about ballet or the company, is now in evidence. An orchestra seat on a weeknight now costs $32, putting the ballet in the entertainment class with a Broadway show; and the company is going in for more conventional glamour than it ever did under Balanchine, with new sets, smiley faces, and even extroverted personalities in the pop ballets like *Union Jack*. One night I heard a woman behind me explaining to her friend: "*Square Dance* is a ballet about square dancing, but it doesn't have a story." (*Square Dance* is a classical ballet.) The same night half the audience left before *Liebeslieder Walzer* and half of the remainder left *during* that ballet. It may be significant that *Ecstatic Orange* came between those two Balanchine classics.

Marketing is the biggest word in today's dance world, and without a living, breathing genius to market, NYCB faces an image crisis. The Balanchine legacy is extensive and durable, and is bound to dominate programming for a long time to come. But NYCB's repertory will gradually shade off until the Balanchine ballets make up a smaller and smaller proportion of it. Everyone agrees that maintaining a repertory or even reviving old works is not enough to motivate a dance enterprise over the long term. Dancers seem to do their best when new works are made on them, and the presence of a few premieres over a season is a virtual prerequisite to the press coverage that stimulates the box office. During the last two weeks of the nine-week 1987 spring season, only half the scheduled ballets were Balanchine's.

So where are these new works to come from, and what kind of works will they be? At present the non-Balanchine repertory originates almost entirely from the two chief ballet masters, Jerome Robbins and Peter Martins, with Martins the most prolific producer of

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novelties. Martins has proved a competent classical choreographer—he can put together a coherent, attractive display of the academic vocabulary in a variety of period guises. *Les Gentilhommes*, new this spring, was a classical showpiece for nine young men, set to music of Handel, with simple costuming that suggested the eighteenth century. In addition to filling the never-ending repertory gap, it demonstrated that the company has male talent in the ranks.

But Martins is also trying to make ballets with a more modern look. *Ecstatic Orange*, the latest effort in this vein, illustrates very well how narrow is the borderline between classicism and modernism—or between a classic and an efficient contemporary product. It looks like innumerable other ballets that have come out of the European opera houses in the years of the Dance Boom, and purists immediately dubbed it *Agent Orange*. The company certainly has done modern ballets—Balanchine was peerless in that form too, and Robbins dabbles in it from time to time. But the genre of *Ecstatic Orange* is peculiarly inimical to classicism though it exists only because of classical skill. I have difficulty talking about the piece without employing paradoxes.

First, there's Michael Torke's score, which dictates both the form and the style of the ballet. For a large orchestra, the music is itself an attempt to coax mileage out of a theme no longer in fashion. It's a kind of bombastic minimalism, based in repetition, with no real structural development, with flamboyant harmonic and coloristic effects borrowed from nineteenth-century music, and with infectious but not always predictable rhythms. Shallow and of no compelling interest, this music is too blatant to ignore. The ballet is like that too. Martins dresses his nine couples in black Milliskin, with the tights anachronistically cut off at the calf. The women wear pony tails. The vocabulary is classical steps with stretches and twists, skewed positions, rubbery torsos, each series of moves underscored by prominent pauses or surrounded by walking/running passages.

Where Balanchine's modern ballets used an expanded vocabulary to deepen the discursive and structural possibilities of steps, Martins cuts his ties to classicism by abandoning structure. Each of the dance's three sections offers dancing, seemingly neither inflected nor developed, in different energies and tempi. Though there's a principal couple (Heather Watts and Jock Soto) and two solo couples (Helene Alexopoulos and Mel Tomlinson, Victoria Hall and Peter Frame), they scarcely distinguish themselves from the rest of the dancers, who often pose in mass formations within which small groups sidestep or assume different shapes for a measure or two. The movement thus pans across the ensemble without any member of the ensemble dancing all the way through. In the final section (premiered in January), the music and the movement are so undistinguished that many dancers were still counting to themselves, to find their cues. The middle section, a duet for Watts and Soto, is set to a quasi-Latin rhythm with modernish harmonies that remind-

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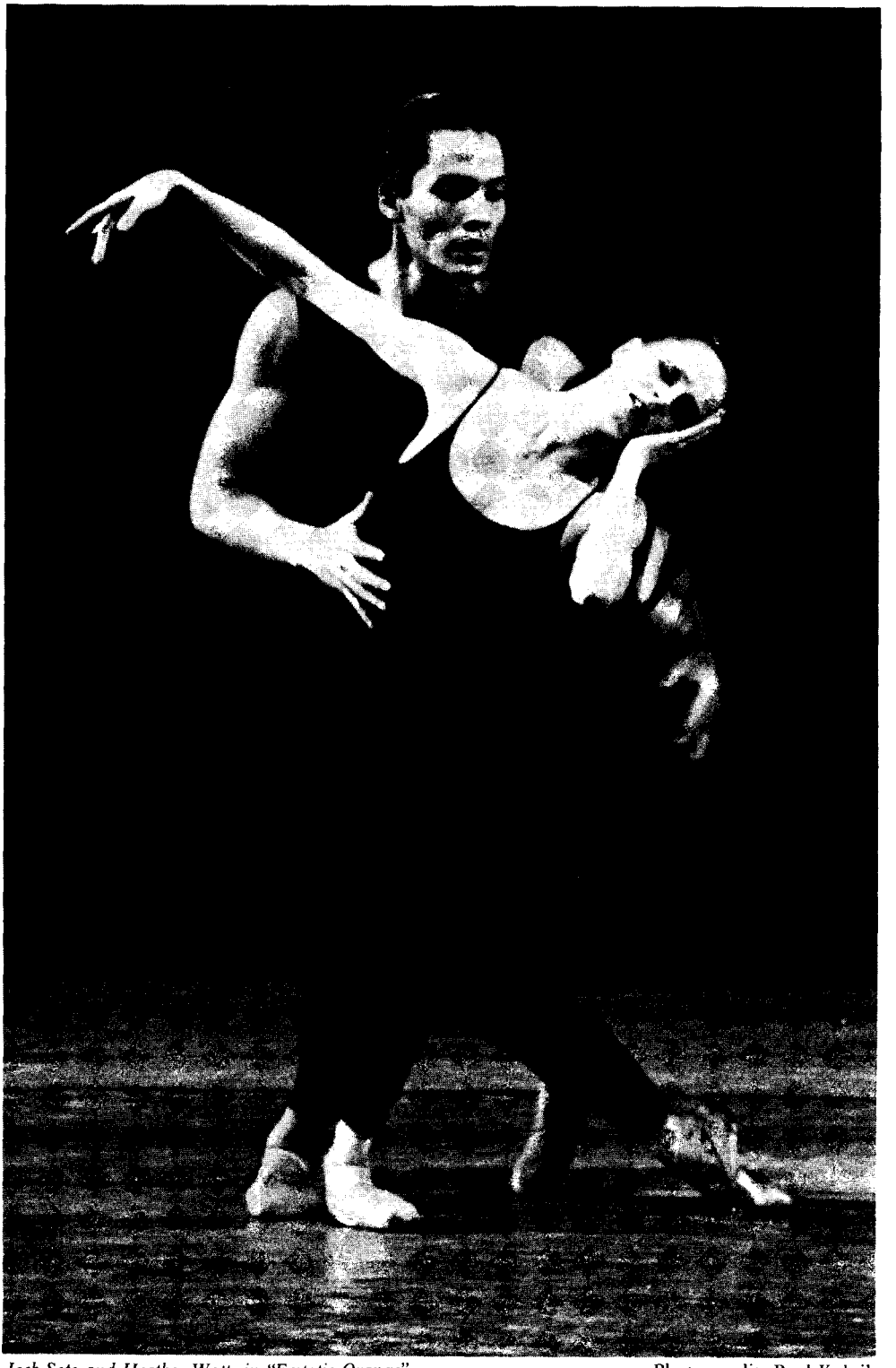

Jock Soto and Heather Watts in "Ecstatic Orange" Photo credit: Paul Kolnik

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ed me of the slow rhumba in Robbins/Bernstein's *Fancy Free.* The dancers wind around each other and corkscrew outward in the trickiest shapes imaginable. I thought their dance was possibly about sexual avoidance and capitulation, but definitely not about desire.

Desire—or any other emotionality that demands commitment—is not something I've seen in Martins' ballets. Disengagement is what makes his work, so far, less than great. He demands sweat from his dancers but not love. *Ecstatic Orange* exhibits a kind of dispassionate, egalitarian objectivity that many European ballets share today. The dancers display; the audience admires. Nobody gets involved. To see Balanchine-trained dancers doing this style, you realize the uniquely humanizing influence of Balanchine. Classical ballet is an exhibitionistic pursuit, and in the past its fierce impersonality has been tempered by the interpolation of stories, the sensuality of exotic trappings, or the earthiness and swing of assimilated folk dances. Without resorting to any of these devices, Balanchine allowed us to see dancers as both technical exemplars and individual interpreters.

As the Balanchine temperament recedes from the repertory and the training, NYCB as a dancing ensemble is also changing. I find it difficult to distinguish some of the youngest dancers featured so often in Martins' ballets, and the fans' favorite game of picking out promising newcomers in the corps seems less interesting. Among the leading dancers, we see less of great individualists like Patricia McBride and Bart Cook, more of people trained outside the School of American Ballet, like the Kozlovs, Otto Neubert, Robert LaFosse. For some devotees the retirement of Suzanne Farrell irrevocably changed the look of the company. Without her as a supreme model for personal style adapted to Balanchine style, younger dancers opt for either bland proficiency or the exploitation of physical shortcomings: quirkiness as style.

Following a Balanchine tradition of casting opposite types in the twin-ballerina roles of *Concerto Barocco*, the company paired Heather Watts and Judith Fugate, allowing us to see how Fugate's whole body is energized in maintaining a clean line, the rhythm of her step flowing through from the center to the extremities; while Watts compensates for a nearly inert torso by exaggerating every head and shoulder articulation until it becomes almost a distortion of line. In the pas de deux in *Agon,* Watts has to work hard to do the steps, while Mel Tomlinson's effort goes into slurring through them. Together they draw out the transitions between the extraordinary poses, so that they seem to be enjoying his bizarre manipulations of her limbs. Another peculiar pairing was Christopher d'Amboise with Merrill Ashley in *Square Dance.* Ashley, still in fabulous technical shape though a trifle slower, is best matched with a strong, secure partner like Sean Lavery, who was out most of the season with an injury. D'Amboise is thin and wispy. He collapses in the

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middle and flaps at the extremities, is flexible without being articulate, and looks as if the basic gestures and positions are foreign to his body. He jumps high and the audience finds him charming. In the Melancholic variation of *Four Temperaments*, he seemed to be trying misguidedly for a "real" effect, sinking into his hip and dropping his energy level to neutral in between steps.

Balanchine could achieve expression without resorting to naturalism; the reason we don't think of his ballets as expressive primarily is that his expressive devices were contained in steps and subordinate to the refining process of music. The dancers who are the most expressive within his ballets, like Farrell, can make character and sometimes even story emerge out of their inner sense of the movement. In *Prodigal Son* this spring Darci Kistler did the Siren, a role I've associated in recent years with the steely-cold and implacable Karin von Aroldingen. Kistler lured the hapless Prodigal (La Fosse) by being truly sexy and truly feminine. She looked as if the erotic pleasure of seducing him turned her on as much as the triumph of destroying him afterward. Kistler also made a striking debut in *La Sonnambula*, the most otherworldly sleepwalker since Allegra Kent.

Late in the season, one of the most atypical ballets in the repertory offered a surprising demonstration of the resources a truly great institution can bring to bear. As other companies ostentatiously load the nineteenth-century story ballets with more elaborate stage magic and decorative *schlag*, the NYCB's *Coppélia* comes as a shock. Balanchine revived it, with Alexandra Danilova, in 1974, retaining what they could remember of the 1884 Petipa choreography and inventing the rest. The controversial result looks clean and focussed in spite of its discordant Rouben Ter-Arutunian sets and Karinska costumes. Dispensing with most of the traditional, distracting business, peasants, parents, Balanchine and Danilova concentrated on dancing but preserved the story with clearly visible mime scenes.

Shaun O'Brien, their original Dr. Coppélius, now has his role sharpened to the most exquisite details. As the dotty, slightly sinister dollmaker, his toy creations are far more real to him than the unsympathetic villagers. In his workshop domain he's mastermind and, O'Brien suggests, ballet master too, as he shadows and directs the movements of his magically animated doll in a paternal pas de deux. The doll, of course, is the mischievous Swanilda. But even when her trick is discovered, Coppélius drags the real doll around with him as if she were his own flesh and blood.

The Swanilda, Patricia McBride, was also the creator of the role in this production, and it was moving to see her again in it. McBride has made minor technical adjustments in the choreography as she's grown older, but they aren't obvious, and Ib Andersen partnered her solicitously, making the trickiest lifts look beautiful. Both of them acted their adolescent roles with the restraint and

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generosity that only maturity can permit. The performance also delivered fine solos by some of the most interesting second-rank featured dancers, Lauren Hauser, Helene Alexopoulos and Melinda Roy; and the unbeatable bonus of twenty-four little girls in the Dance of the Hours. The matinee audience cheered at the end, and I suddenly found myself choked up when a young man stepped out of the corps and handed McBride a bouquet.

With Ashley nearing forty and McBride forty-five, the great ballerina in the company now is Kyra Nichols, an extraordinary technician who is capable of surprising me no matter how many times I've seen her. Nichols keeps alive in the upper body without sacrificing the clarity of her leg action. You can see exactly what she's doing, no matter how subtly she phrases things. In *Walpurgisnacht Ballet* she played with sudden legatos and tenutos, speeded up, got increasingly detailed in one variation, without looking either fazed or insistent. I didn't see enough of her, though. In most of the ballets where I would have expected Nichols, Valentina Kozlova appeared. Pretty, accomplished, and almost totally a-musical, Kozlova seems to be carrying on the NYCB's tradition of hard-working, attractive, inexpressive principal dancers.

A more endearing tradition is the staging of festive occasions for close supporters and friends. Midseason, the company and school celebrated Lincoln Kirstein's eightieth birthday with an evening of surprises that included a preview of the forthcoming—not yet fully financed—*Sleeping Beauty*. While the NYCB Orchestra, onstage for once, played the overture and Prologue music, I mentally cast the ballet—it would star Kistler, of course, with Nichols as the Lilac Fairy, and a little-known youngster in each of the fairy variations. . . . Before I got to the prince and the other characters, Peter Martins came out to introduce a semi-promotional film that showed off David Mitchell's proposed designs. Over a condensed version of the score, Martins told the story of the ballet while cutout figures flashed through model sets. After that, the corps and children of the school performed Balanchine's *Garland Dance*, choreographed for the 1981 Tschaikovsky Festival, with all ten principal female dancers as benevolent fairies. Other bonbons of the evening included Jerome Robbins' *Circus Polka*, with unannounced guest Mikhail Baryshnikov in the role of the ringmaster, and the little girls spelling out the initials L.K. at the end. And there were speeches—short ones—and a big birthday cake onstage, and music, dancers, flowers, balloons, and a toast by Farrell and ballet mistress Rosemary Dunleavy.

Only the New York City Ballet knows how to put on events like this with aplomb. What's so extraordinary about them is how democratic they are. I always feel warm and proprietary after one of these bashes, the way I imagine people in much smaller towns feel about their local orchestra or art museum. Lincoln Kirstein, the principal articulator of the company's ethic and aesthetic over the years, likes to picture NYCB as the people's ballet, though his re-

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cent statements in print have grown more emphatically exclusionary. Perhaps trying to counter the Balanchine backlash incited by the memoirs of various disaffected dancers, Kirstein jousts with dance history like some literary Don Quixote, skewering the modern dance pioneers for not establishing academies, relegating all contemporary modernism to the status of therapy or jogging, lopping off rival ballet heads, and swiping at the experimentalists who've had the only new ideas about dancing in several decades.

Kirstein's dilemma is a tragic one. He fought this battle for fifty years in order to establish and hold Balanchine's position as the culminating genius in the history of theatrical dancing. Now that Balanchine is no longer alive, the trashing of everyone else has left the Balanchine institution with few access routes to the future. His direct heirs are, so far, academic journeymen without any burning revelations to offer. The company has never seen the virtue of maintaining an archive of ballet classics, so the twentieth-century repertory of Fokine, Nijinsky, Nijinska, Ashton, Tudor, the Americans has fallen into less likely hands. Robert Joffrey's admirable undertaking of this task—he will stage Millicent Hodson's long-awaited reconstruction of Nijinsky's *Sacre du Printemps* this fall—is sometimes hindered by the immaturity and stylistic neutrality of his dancers.

At the end of the season, the NYCB delivered another surprise: for next spring, not the *Sleeping Beauty*, but an American Music Festival. Barrels of new works will be done over the three-week event, and the choreographers announced so far include Jean-Pierre Bonnefous, Laura Dean, Eliot Feld, William Forsythe, Lar Lubovitch, Paul Taylor, Helgi Tomasson, Peter Martins, and the late Joseph Duell. The omissions from this list are as interesting as the inclusions—most of whom never got near the company in Balanchine's lifetime. Missing are young company members who have ventured into choreography recently—Bart Cook, Daniel Duell, Miriam Mahdaviani—or any alumni working elsewhere like Bruce Wells (Boston), Kent Stowell and Francia Russell (Seattle). Even more glaringly, Twyla Tharp is absent. Besides Merce Cunningham, who may be represented with a revival of *Summerspace*, Tharp is the modernist most seriously and successfully committed to reshaping classicism in contemporary terms. In addition, she collaborated in 1984 with Robbins on *Brahms/Handel*, which invigorated the NYCB dancers as no new work since Balanchine has done. Come to think of it, no contribution of Robbins has been promised either—what an opportunity this would be to recover one of his psychological ballets of the fifties. The American Music Festival is obviously intended to follow in the glorious footsteps of Stravinsky (1972 and 1982), Ravel (1975), and Tschaikovsky (1981), all of which produced some wonderful ballets. What's needed even more than that is a clear direction, a line of thought that can carry the company into a new era. Dancers and critics will be working hard to seize it, and hoping for the best.

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BERT CARDULLO

Viet Nam Revisited

THE VIET NAM WAR HAS BEEN RECEIVING serious treatment on film since at least 1968, when Eugene S. Jones's apolitical documentary *A Face of War* appeared along with Peter Brook's antiwar feature *Tell Me Lies*. In 1978 alone, we were given these features: *The Deer Hunter*, *The Boys in Company C*, and *Go Tell the Spartans*. In 1979, there was *Apocalypse Now*. At the moment, there's *Platoon*, and coming soon are *Full Metal Jacket*, *Hamburger Hill*, *Letters to Loved Ones*, and several others.

I'd like to talk here about *Platoon* and *Go Tell the Spartans* (based on the novel *Incident at Muc Wa*, by Daniel Ford), since they are the best fiction films I know about Viet Nam combat and since they are at opposite ends of one important spectrum: the former is getting too much attention, and the latter never got much, having disappeared quietly in the face of highly publicized and overproduced films like *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*. One of the reasons for all the attention lavished on *Platoon* is its false publicity: this is *not* the first film to see the war through the eyes of a grunt, or infantryman in the Viet Nam War. *Go Tell the Spartans* does so, and *it* may not have been the first. *Platoon* is, however, the first fiction film to give us so graphically the experience, the feel, of Viet Nam combat—indeed, of modern combat in general—and it is primarily for this portrayal of the war that it will be remembered.

Platoon's plot is similar to that of *Go Tell the Spartans*: a raw infantryman gets initiated into both the horrors of combat and the mire of Viet Nam; he begins by believing in the war, in the United States's mission in Southeast Asia, and ends by realizing that he doesn't belong there, that, in the words of the veteran Sergeant Oleonowski (Jonathan Goldsmith) from *Spartans*, "It's their [the Vietnamese people's] war." As a work of fiction about the war, as opposed to a vivid depiction of combat, *Spartans* is the finer film, for several reasons. *Platoon* has been criticized by some for being a "revenge fantasy" more than a realistic account of the Viet Nam War, and there is some truth to this criticism. Sergeants Elias (Willem Dafoe) and Barnes (Tom Berenger) represent opposite points of view that crystallize in a confrontation in a Vietnamese village. After the ambush and murder of one of the platoon's men on a patrol, Barnes raids the nearby village, which he suspects is friendly to the Viet Cong and has supplied the Cong with information on American operations in the area. He murders the wife of the village lead-

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er and is ready to shoot the man's young daughter in order to get him to talk. Elias stops Barnes, fights him, and later in the film is himself shot by Barnes and left to bleed to death in the jungle. After *Platoon*'s final battle, Pfc. Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen), the now-seasoned protagonist, kills Barnes for what he did to Elias. Taylor says, in one of the film's many sententious lines—most of them coming, like the following, in the form of his voice-over comments, which are taken from his letters to his grandmother—that he's "a child born of two fathers," Barnes and Elias. The one represents the "win-at-any-cost" mentality and believes in the war, the other preaches restraint and disbelieves in what he's doing (though he fights and kills expertly when he must, of course). We have here fantastic or compensatory melodrama, not realism: Elias is the "good guy," the guy with a heart, representing the view we'd like to think we'd have had, had we been in Viet Nam, and Barnes is the heartless "bad guy"; once Barnes shoots Elias, we wait for Taylor to avenge Elias by shooting Barnes, and we're not disappointed.

The problem with this opposition between Barnes and Elias, obviously, is that it oversimplifies a very complex situation: it gives us melodrama, not realism. If we know anything about Viet Nam, we know that Barnes could well have been correct about the village (Stone, coyly, never reveals the political sympathies of the villagers) and that, if he was correct, he was taking the only possible action in order to discover the truth: threaten the village and its inhabitants with extinction. Although I sympathize with Elias—I myself hotly resisted the war and twice evaded the draft—I submit that one cannot fight a war and disbelieve in it as he does. Or rather, that to fight a war in such a manner is as futile as to fight the kind of "static-defense" war we waged against the Viet Cong in the first place, and is dishonest to boot. The film implies that Elias' position is sensible, even noble, especially when it has him say, "We been kickin' other people's asses for so long I figure it's time we got ours kicked."

Go Tell the Spartans improves on this melodramatic opposition between Barnes and Elias. It puts a South Vietnamese scout-interpreter, a sergeant nicknamed Cowboy, in the role of Barnes, and Ted Post, the director, casts the likable, baby-faced Evan Kim in the part (Barnes was played by a scarred, tough-looking Tom Berenger). Cowboy opens *Spartans* by holding a Viet Cong's head under water in order to get him to confess; later he beheads another Cong who won't talk; and in the film's turning point, he insists that a Vietnamese family hanging around the American-occupied hamlet of Muc Wa consists wholly of Cong-sympathizers. Who opposes him? Not a canny Sergeant Elias-type, but Corporal Courcey (Craig Wasson), this film's equivalent of *Platoon*'s Chris Taylor. Courcey believes what the equally green Second Lieutenant Hamilton (Joe Unger) says in support of the action to save the family: that it's part of

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Americans' job in Viet Nam not only to defeat the enemy, but also "to win the hearts and minds of the people." Yes, this is sententious dialogue also, but there's a difference: it's meant to be both comic and ironic, given our knowledge of how the war turned out. *Platoon*'s sententious lines are meant to be taken seriously and, as a result, sound ridiculous.

Courcey and Cowboy, unlike Barnes and Elias, don't get into a scuffle over their disagreement; they disagree but remain friends and comrades. Cowboy is eventually proved to be correct about the family, which Courcey and Hamilton had allowed to move into the American encampment. And Courcey's mistaken judgment proves to be the undoing of Major Barker (his commanding officer, played by Burt Lancaster with, for him, some understatement), Cowboy himself, and the entire South Vietnamese militia stationed at Muc Wa. Courcey nobly remains behind in the hamlet after the evacuation of American troops in the face of a Viet Cong siege: he feels obligated to lead the South Vietnamese troops to safety, and Major Barker, out of admiration for (and bewilderment at) his corporal's behavior, stays to help him. Instead, they lead the South Vietnamese into an ambush that has been set up with information provided to the Cong by a member of the very family Courcey had welcomed to Muc Wa.

Courcey is the only survivor of the attack, and he survives, paradoxically, only because he had in fact won the heart and mind of one Vietnamese, an old soldier who dragged him to safety before himself perishing in the firefight. Like Taylor in his final battle, Courcey passes out from his wounds, awakens the next day, and staggers into light. Unlike Taylor, he kills no Barnes. Rather, he himself is almost killed as he wanders back to Muc Wa and through its French cemetery, over whose 302 graves is inscribed Simonides' couplet about Leonidas and his Spartan band of 300 who were killed at Thermopylae in 480 B.C. in a battle with Persian forces: "Go tell the Spartans, thou that passeth by, / That here, obedient to their laws, we lie." We are reminded of the French experience in Viet Nam, and we are reminded of our own arrogance in believing that we could avoid their mistakes. *Go Tell the Spartans* takes place in 1964, before actual American combat troops arrived in Viet Nam; Courcey and his fellow American soldiers are all "military advisors." As he wobbles through the cemetery, the young Courcey is confronted by an old Cong sniper who raises his gun, then lowers it without firing. They stare at each other, and the American says first, "I'm goin' home, Charlie," then, echoing Sergeant Oleonowski (whose comment, made early in the film, he had ignored up to now), "It's their war," before walking off. It's as if the Cong sniper knows that Courcey will suffer more if he lives—lives with the knowledge of his own folly in getting his comrades massacred, and lives to see his folly repeated again and again, in different but ever larger form, in the eleven years to come.

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Courcey leaves the jungle with knowledge that he's earned in agony, if not exactly through *agon*. We *see* him earn it, whereas, for the most part, we hear what Taylor's learned through his voice-over comments. Taylor is less an actor than an observer in the drama of *Platoon*, and that drama, as I have pointed out, is a melodrama that prompts him to release plenty of gas. Some examples: "It's all a blur. I don't know right from wrong anymore"; "We didn't fight the enemy. We fought ourselves, and the enemy is in us"; "The war is in me now, but it will be in me the rest of my days. . . . I want to find a goodness and meaning to this life. . . . It's up to us to build now." These sentiments are either untrue, unearned, or unnecessary. Taylor *does* know right from wrong, he does have a personal code of honor, and Oliver Stone reveals it by having him stop some of his fellow soldiers from raping a Vietnamese girl, and by cutting to him shaking his head in condemnation when Barnes has his pistol at the head of the village leader's daughter. Courcey thinks that he knows right from wrong and discovers that he doesn't. He permits the Vietnamese family to enter Muc Wa over the objections of Cowboy, who wants to execute them, and they turn out to be a pack of Viet Cong spies. He doesn't accept sexual favors from the beautiful daughter of this family because he "respects" her, and she turns out to be the one who reports the American-led South Vietnamese retreat to the Cong; she was trying, through sex, to lure Courcey even further into her confidence. Compare next Taylor's windy "we didn't fight the enemy" lines with their pithy equivalent from *Go Tell the Spartans*: "It's their war." Courcey has paid an awful price for the right to utter these words; Taylor has paid little, really: he didn't fight with himself, he watched Barnes and Elias fight each other, and he killed the enemy that he believed was lodged in *Barnes*. As for the war's being in Taylor now and the rest of his days, well, I daresay this is true of most Viet Nam veterans: we don't need to hear it. We know by *looking at* Courcey at the end that it's true of him.

Another measure of the difference between Courcey and Taylor is the way that each arrived in Viet Nam. Courcey tells Major Barker that he's a draftee, but up to this point (1964), there haven't been any draftees for this "conflict." Barker is puzzled, and he expresses his puzzlement three or four times during the film until Courcey finally reveals the truth: he got into a fight with a brigadier general in the States, and his punishment was either the brig or Viet Nam. He adds that he came, not only to avoid prison, but also to find out what war was like. Taylor, by contrast, says, much to the amazement of his fellow soldiers in Bravo Company, that he volunteered for combat duty in Viet Nam (it's 1967). He left college, where he "wasn't learning anything" (whose fault was that?), to enlist for two reasons: (1) because he felt bad that only the poor were going to war; and (2) because he thought that, as an infantryman, he could see something he hadn't yet seen or learn something

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he didn't yet know. He sees a lot that he hasn't seen before, but, to judge from his voice-over comments, he doesn't learn anything, and I'm not sure there *was* anything to learn from Viet Nam—except that we shouldn't have been there. Courcey discovers this for himself; Taylor doesn't: he gets this knowledge from Elias. Courcey comes to Viet Nam because he has little choice, and, much to his distaste, he finds out what war is like. Like Taylor, he has apparently spent some time in college (he translates Simonides' couplet from the French for a comrade); unlike Taylor, he doesn't make his education an issue. Taylor comes to Viet Nam because he wants both to martyr himself to the poor (who obviously were neither the only Americans to serve in Viet Nam nor the only ones to serve as enlisted men in the infantry) and to improve on his education. He's painfully misguided in both instances, but Oliver Stone's screenplay doesn't make clear that *it's* aware of this, probably because Stone can't see past himself, on whom the character of Taylor is based. Stone wants us to believe both that the Viet Nam War was futile *and* that Chris Taylor's experience there was not futile, that it was better for him to have served than not to have done so. He wants us to see the war in Viet Nam both as a debasing national experience *and* as the ultimate male rite of passage, as a kind of college for poor boys (read: real men). He's confused, and as a result he creates a split and confusing character, a character who lives one war experience and tells us about another; who fights bravely and effectively, but who feels compelled to generalize about the war in negative terms that recall his ridiculous reasons for volunteering in the first place as well as his teacher-pupil relationship with Elias.

Courcey has no such confusion; he comes to Viet Nam without preconception or expectation. He *knows* that he will find out what the experience of combat is like, and he does. He learns firsthand that it's the Vietnamese people's war, not the Americans'. And, like his nation, he is debased by his experience, not elevated by it. Courcey talks not of goodness, meaning, or rebuilding at the end, but only of getting out of Viet Nam. He will go home a broken man, to tell the "Spartans" how, obedient to their laws, his comrades lie.

Platoon is, naturally, about one platoon in Bravo Company. This platoon is under the command of the inexperienced, college-educated Second Lieutenant Wolfe (Mark Moses); Staff Sergeant Barnes is below him, and Sergeant Elias just below Barnes. Wolfe is nominally in charge—the seasoned Barnes makes most of the decisions. The same situation exists in *Go Tell the Spartans,* except that there's no conflict between the two sergeants. Oleonowski is the decision-maker behind the green Lieutenant Hamilton, and Cowboy is the native advisor to them both. I detail all this for a reason: *Spartans* makes something of this hierarchy, *Platoon* doesn't. *Spartans* joins Hamilton's experience to Courcey's, the callow lieutenant's to the callow corporal's. *Platoon* adds Wolfe for show or, more proper-

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ly, for caricature. Yes, Wolfe is shown stupidly leading his men right into enemy fire in the third battle, but he's never made accountable for his blunder, he never pays any consequences. By the fourth and final battle, he has nearly drifted out of the film. Wolfe is around to be sneered at, little more: he's the naïve, all-American WASP (touring the barracks at one point in a tee shirt marked "Ohio State Wrestling") to the street-smart, working-class men (Taylor excepted) beneath him. Curiously, Taylor and Wolfe make no connection: Taylor, you see, didn't learn anything in school, so now he prefers the company of men from the real world to that of boys from college.

Courcey and Hamilton do make a connection: they're both naïve enough to think that Cowboy is an unchecked killing machine instead of a shrewd, dedicated foe of the Viet Cong, and in checking him they limit his effectiveness. Courcey gets to shed his naïveté about the war but pays a price to do so. Hamilton doesn't get to shed his and, unlike Wolfe, pays a price for not doing so. After an engagement with the enemy, the Americans, led by Lieutenant Hamilton, retreat hurriedly to Muc Wa. Just before they arrive, a South Vietnamese soldier is hit and, against Sergeant Oleonowski's vehement protests, Hamilton returns to get the man. Oleonowski, a veteran of Korea and of one tour of duty already in Viet Nam, knows better, knows the danger they're in; Hamilton insists on his responsibility to the wounded man and on his right as commanding officer to make this decision. He goes back to find the South Vietnamese dead, then he himself is shot to death by the advancing Viet Cong. Oleonowski cries, and he later refuses, at Courcey's urging, to attend Hamilton's funeral. Instead, he kills himself. He's "sick and tired of the fish-stinking dinks," he's burned out on fighting, and, in a sense, he's sacrificing himself to all the Hamiltons of war. How many war films can you name in which a soldier commits suicide in the field? It happens here, it happens for a reason, and it has the stink of authenticity about it. Courcey doesn't understand Oleonowski's action—yet.

Where *Platoon* is superb, and *Go Tell the Spartans* adequate, is in the depiction of battle, of the infantryman's experience of battle. This is not to fault *Spartans*: its adequate combat scenes need not be anything more, because this film is less interested in the feel of combat than in the rationale behind this kind of war. *Platoon* is interested in both these matters and succeeds only in the former. Oliver Stone understands how to use film to convey the soldier's sense of a firefight: you keep the camera in close, you clutter the frame if men don't already fill it, you cut a lot within the scene, and even when you pull the camera back for a medium shot, you don't shoot in deep focus. When you want to give the viewer an idea of the geography of a battle, you don't pull the camera far back for a long shot (a perspective denied the infantryman in combat), you shoot

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from a helicopter—that is, from a point of view the infantryman has only on his way into or out of combat, never during. The result: the viewer gets a sense of the chaos, claustrophobia, nearsightedness, anxiety, and swiftness of battle. Yes, all of these, all at once, and all adding up to the powerlessness felt by the man with a gun amidst a sea of guns.

We don't feel powerlessness in the battle scenes of *Go Tell the Spartans*, and we're never hemmed in by them or confused by their geography (therefore, although helicopters are used in this film to transport men, they're not used to give us a clear picture of the battlefield, because we already have such a picture from the ground), because Ted Post wants to give us, not the experience of combat, but a meditation on the war. There's far more "combat time" in *Platoon* than in *Spartans—Platoon* is structured around four battles, the last one being the biggest—and I found myself wishing that the film had abandoned its melodrama and its voice-over altogether for one continuous battle or series of battles, with appropriate *unstoried* respites. When *Platoon* thinks, or thinks it's thinking, about the war, it falters; when it feels the war, lives the war, it moves. *Platoon* is the body to the mind of *Go Tell the Spartans*. At its best, *Platoon* captures what it's like constantly to look death in the face, to the point that one must, figuratively speaking, give up one's life in order to remain sane. At its best, *Spartans* gives us an American tragedy, a tragedy compounded by the fact that it will take America eleven more years of suffering to learn what Courcey did in 1964. It's time that this film received the recognition it deserves, and it's time that *Platoon* be put in its place—on a double bill alongside *Spartans*.

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RICHARD HORNBY

Theatre: Our Middle-Aged Avant-Garde

"HAPPENINGS," THOSE 1960S PERFORMANCES characterized by anti-intellectualism, antiliterariness, and a wit more *merdoyant* than mordant, varied from the spontaneous pieces, often performed in unlikely places like the New York subway, of Allan Kaprow, to the more controlled, rehearsed, arty versions of Michael Kirby. The latter type survived, and have gained the pretentious name, "Performance Art." Notable practitioners include Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, and Ping Chong; their works have scripts or at least scenarios, and are characterized by striking visual images, fragmentary dialogue, and middlebrow seriousness.

One such piece was Martha Clarke's *The Hunger Artist*, performed last winter at St. Mark's Church on West 46th Street by her Music-Theatre Group. Loosely based on writings of Kafka, as adapted by Richard Greenberg, the production involved seven performers quoting his works at random (not just "The Hunger Artist," but also "A Country Doctor," "Letter to His Father," and "The Metamorphosis") as they moved about the stage and assumed contorted positions, often suggestive of a variety of sexual or excremental acts. Their vivid early twentieth-century costumes, designed by Robert Israel, were in the surrealist style of René Magritte. The setting, also by Israel, consisted of a big pile of dirt with a hole dug at the center, backed by two gray, vertically striped walls angling from upstage center, punctured by a window and having a freestanding door at one side. Richard Peaslee arranged Czechoslovakian folk songs to provide musical accompaniment.

A number of scenes featured a large photograph of Kafka himself, as if the director felt the need to remind us of the supposed author of the piece. John Simon wrote a diatribe in *New York* magazine showing how much Clarke and Greenberg misunderstood Kafka, and he was quite right; this production had no more real connection with Kafka's works than Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach* had to do with Relativity. In particular, the adapter and director here focussed on the bizarre content of Kafka's works, rather than on the mundane, understated manner in which that content is presented. A man turning into a bug may seem a wild and terrifying event, but Kafka's characters merely react to it with discomfort, shame, or annoyance, as if the victim were suffering from some or-

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dinary, chronic, messy disease. The characters in the original stories are drably bourgeois, which makes them far more truly frightening than the outlandish grotesques in this stage version.

But perhaps this is an unfair criticism. After all, it is not as if Kafka had written a play, which the Music-Theatre Group misinterpreted in production; instead, Kafka's texts were only supposed to be a stimulus for an *original* play. We do not fault Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for being unfaithful to Bandello's story, the play's ultimate source. Considered on their own terms, Israel's sets and costumes were striking, Paul Gallo's lighting was hauntingly effective, and the grotesqueries of the performers, especially Anthony Holland, lean and magnetic in his black and white checked suit and bowler hat, were marvelously controlled and stylish.

The problem with the piece comes back to that photo of Kafka again. *Romeo and Juliet* swallows up Bandello's story, so that even if you have read it, you forget about it in production; the play lives on its own terms. Clarke's play did not swallow up Kafka's works, but merely alluded to them. Even if you had not read them, you were constantly aware that the origins of the production were some nondramatic literary works by a famous author. A foreigner who understood no English might have enjoyed the performance, but for those of us who did understand it, the familiar passages seemed irrelevant and intrusive. In a sense there was *too much* Kafka, but it was all second hand, and worshipful rather than adapted.

Another vestige of the theatrical avant-garde of the 1960s is the altered classic. For over a century, the stage director (a position that had previously never even existed) rose in importance from coordinator, to mentor and interpreter, to playwright's collaborator, and finally in many instances to central theatre artist, far more important than either playwright or actor. The playscript became merely raw material, from which the director crafted a personal statement that was also relevant for our times; the result was not a new play, however, but was supposed to be true to the original—truer, somehow, than versions that timidly followed what the playwright had written.

One such director is Andrei Serban, born in Romania in 1943, who studied at the State Institute of Theatrical and Cinematographic Arts in Bucharest, where he came to the attention of Liviu Ciulei, head of the Bulandria Theatre there. Both Ciulei and Serban have since come to the United States; both are proponents of applying strong directorial concepts to plays; both are well trained and knowledgeable about the theatre. Their work thus provides fairer examples than most for judging "concept" theatre, since many other practitioners, particularly American ones, lack the skill and discipline that these Romanians bring to their work. The deficiencies of their productions can be taken to derive from their approach itself, rather than any lack of craft, diligence, or education.

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Serban came to the United States in 1970 on an invitation from Ellen Stewart, free-spirited founder of Café La MaMa in Greenwich Village. Serban directed a number of classical plays at La MaMa in the early seventies, including *Ubu Roi*, *Arden of Feversham*, *Medea*, *The Trojan Women*, and *Electra*. This year, in celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of La MaMa and its long-standing commitment to avant-garde theatre, Serban restaged the last three under the title, *Fragments of a Greek Trilogy*.

The Trojan Women and *Electra* were performed on the same bill. Standing in the lobby (the performance started there) I wrote the following notes bemusedly: A lot of men dressed in bed sheets are marching about shouting angrily. A group of women, similarly dressed and equally noisy, are unhappy about something. "Hey! Hey!" cry the men. "Hoy! Hoy!" cry the women. We move into the theatre itself, a large dark loft with a high ceiling, with platforms scattered about. Much shouting and jumping off platforms. The words are incomprehensible; apparently they are shouting in Greek. One of the angry men accidentally stomps on my left foot. Is this classical? Think of Oedipus, Achilles, Philoctetes. Limping, I retire to the sidelines. A woman pours water on a little boy's head. A woman with a shaved head is stripped naked on a platform. She is not shaved everywhere. People rub mud on her. "Ha! Ha!" they shout, "Wa! Wa!" Apparently the women are happy. There is some running up and down a ramp. Someone dies, I think. The actors go out. The lights come up. The play is over. I take off my shoe and rub my sore foot.

It was not hard to see where a performance of this sort came from; its principal inspiration was not Euripides' text, which the audience could not understand anyway, but instead various academic theories about ritual and the origins of Greek tragedy, plus the social protest movements of the late sixties and early seventies. The ritual origins of Greek tragedy are by no means proven, but even if the theory is correct, its application to theatrical production is an example of what is known as the "genetic fallacy," the foolish idea that the beginnings of something tell us all we need to know about its later evolutions. A Greek tragedy is not "essentially" a ritual any more than an automobile is "essentially" iron ore. A Greek tragedy is a *play*, and a highly sophisticated, complex, and, yes, literary one at that. Although recent scholarship has stressed the importance of the irrational in classical Greek culture, the fact that the Greeks recognized the significance of emotion as well as reason did not make them or their plays any less civilized.

The antiwar and feminist trappings of Serban's production were in the same vein; since Euripides' inspiration for his play was probably the Athenians' behavior at Melos in the Peloponnesian War, one decides that *The Trojan Women* is also "essentially" an antiwar play, and hence is best served in production today by turning it into an

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antiwar rally; or, since Euripides was notorious for his women characters, that it is "essentially" a feminist tract. The genetic fallacy leads to a falsely dualistic model of a play as consisting of an outer shell of nonessentials (the words, or, more precisely, the *specifics* of the particular play) surrounding a supposedly genuine core (the historical origins of the dramatic form, or the playwright's intentions). In this view, the specifics of a production have no importance other than to transmit the play's inner meaning. Thus, the contemporary director is fully justified in stripping them away and replacing them with others that are "relevant to today," and hence more likely to get that inner meaning across. This attitude was apparent in Clarke's *Hunger Artist* too, where the production solemnly presented the inner angst of Kafka's works at the expense of tone, imagery, and irony, and yet was supposed to be true to his vision.

Serban's *Electra* was better than his *Trojan Women.* Here he decided that the play's essential core was not ritual but myth; he thus put together a text that drew on *all* the extant Greek versions of the Electra story (one play each by Aeschylus and Sophocles, plus two by Euripides), to stress its universality. Thus the result was more straightforward and bearable than *Trojan Women,* with the emphasis on a line of action rather than on pretentious ritualizing. Nevertheless, the production was again typically lifeless, more interesting to read about in a trendy theatre journal than actually to see. Avant-garde theatre directors are forever reaching for the big statement, the myth, the ritual, the archetype, but when these things are stripped of everything that makes them unusual and specific, the inevitable result is a bore. The power of a play is not in its "core" alone, but in the relation of that core to the play's specifics. The exquisitely balanced moral dilemmas in Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers,* the stark cruelty in Sophocles' *Electra,* the sardonic undercutting in Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes,* are not trivial elements to be casually tossed aside; instead, they are the very things that twist the standard figures of the myth into something odd, unique, and exciting. In theatre as in architecture, God is in the details.

The thrust of our aging avant-garde in the theatre is strongly antiliterary; for over two decades they have been denouncing traditional, literary playscripts as hidebound and restrictive. This attitude merely betrays a lack of knowledge of what literature actually is and how it works. The ultimate irony is that the antiliterary theatre of avant-garde directors like Clarke and Serban seems "literary" in the worst, high schoolish sense—heavy, humorless, overloaded with meaning. Literary theatre is a lot more fun.

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* played last winter in the Vivian Beaumont Theatre at Lincoln Center. Soyinka, a Nigerian whose plays won him the Nobel Prize for Literature last year, directed the production himself. The performance featured attrac-

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tive actors, gorgeous costumes, excellent low-budget pageantry with particularly good handling of crowds, and dense, poetic writing with little concern for plot.

The story of the play is based on an actual incident from the 1940s: The king of a Nigerian tribe has recently died. According to tradition, his Chief Horseman must follow him to death. The Horseman, named Elesin, is exultant, even taking a young bride to celebrate the occasion, as a final earthly gesture. When the local British officials hear about the imminent ritual suicide, they are of course appalled, and move in to prevent it. From Elesin's point of view, however, the interrupted ritual is a terrible personal disgrace, which is only atoned for when his son, a well-educated and apparently Europeanized young man, kills himself in his father's place.

The line of action is thus inherently tragic in the Hegelian sense, a collision of good with good, as two isolated powers make incompatible demands. There is a fine lesson to be inferred about what happens when cultures clash in such fashion; we can't help identifying with the British view, yet at the same time we recognize the validity of the Nigerians' traditional culture and the nobility of the Horseman's self-sacrifice for the good, as he sees it, of his people. The trouble with Soyinka's play, however, was that the playwright seemed to go out of his way to avoid the excitement inherent in the material. In an interview, he scorned the "culture clash" view of the story as simplistic (why?), and in his working out of the plot he avoided dramatic confrontations, even placing the broken ritual—what traditional dramatic criticism would call the "obligatory scene"—offstage. In place of such drama, Soyinka gave us a kind of operatic piece, with lengthy lyrical and philosophical passages combined with, in his staging, a lot of color and movement. Nor did he replace external conflicts with internal ones; the British in the play express misgivings from time to time, but Elesin, and indeed all the Africans, never show the slightest apprehension or self doubt.

Soyinka studied at the University of Leeds with G. Wilson Knight, the leading Shakespeare critic of our century, who insisted on viewing Shakespeare's plays "spatially," emphasizing atmosphere and lyricism at the expense of "the time-sequence which is the story." Soyinka's playwriting shows Knight's influence, and while Knight's view of Shakespeare was refreshing for its time, to downgrade plot (the soul of tragedy, for Aristotle) to this degree is ultimately destructive. The lack of conflict in *Death and the King's Horseman* means that we get a monolithic view of Nigerian tribal culture, lacking in the quirks, oddities, and contradictions that all cultures have. In the past, authors have usually depicted primitive peoples as barbaric and childish, or, conversely, as noble and profound; Soyinka gives us the latter, which is just as naive as the former.

Nevertheless, Soyinka the director managed to surmount the problems created by Soyinka the playwright. The visual elements of

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the production, as noted, were excellent, thanks to a fine production team, with simple but effective settings by David Gropman, stunningly colorful costumes by Judy Dearing, and cool, delicate lighting by Pat Collins. Soyinka used space well on the big open stage of the Beaumont, with precise positionings and groupings, and strong patterns of movement. There was always a good sense of time, locale, and atmosphere, and the connections within groups were always clear. We always felt that we were in Africa, although the huge cast was largely made up of Americans, including the superb black classical actor Earle Hyman as the Horseman. Hyman brought power, dignity, and maturity to the role, dominating the stage whenever he was on it, and convincing me of the validity of his traditional viewpoint, despite my critical misgivings about the play as a whole.

August Wilson's *Fences* deals with a black family living in "a North American industrial city" in the late 1950s. The father, Troy Maxson, is a former star baseball player of the Negro leagues who was too old to get into the majors when they at last opened up to blacks after World War II. He resents the false promise that sports held for him, and blocks his own son's promising career as a football player.

Troy's life has been filled with disappointment, oppression, and just plain bad luck: Raised in the South in bitter poverty, he today cannot even read. As a youth, he served time in the penitentiary as result of a stabbing in a robbery he committed simply to get food. His brother received a head injury in the war that reduced him to a mental child, with only Troy to care for him. Troy holds down a job as a garbage collector, prevented by the color of his skin from getting promoted to driver. All these problems are "fences" that have held him in all his life.

Nevertheless, this is not a bitter play, but a warm and often comic view of black life in America. Troy has a wonderful, loving wife, and a strong friendship with his longtime co-worker, Jim Bono. Troy's relationships with his son, with another son by a previous marriage, and with his retarded brother Gabriel, are not always harmonious, but are always based on deep and genuine feeling.

All the action of the play, in nine scenes spread over eight years, takes place in the Maxsons' back yard. Many of the scenes appear on the surface to be mere slices of life, with nothing much happening, yet, like Chekhov, Wilson always keeps the plot subtly moving forward. Troy jokes and tells stories, rails against the ballplayers of the day—Jackie Robinson is just lucky, there were black teams he could not even have made in the old days!—banters with his wife, argues with his sons and brother, and procrastinates over repairing the back fence, the visible manifestation of the symbol that unifies the play. As with Chekhov, major events take place offstage: we

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hear how Troy eventually gets a promotion by going to his union, and how he drifts into an affair with a young woman (never seen) that nearly wrecks his marriage, and leaves him and his wife with another child to raise when the woman dies in childbirth.

The rift between Troy and his son widens; blocked from going to college on a football scholarship, and disgusted with his father's infidelity, the boy confronts Troy in the only overtly physical scene in the play. In this classic father-son *agon*, each has an opportunity to kill the other, but draws back. Tragedy averted, the son goes off to join the Marines, returning only for his father's funeral years later, confronting the many fences that have figured in their lives—"fences to keep people out, and fences to keep people in."

James Earl Jones was superb in the lead role. He still has the physical strength and agility he had twenty years ago in *The Great White Hope*, and although, like the character he played in *Fences*, he shows his age, he also convinced you of his underlying athletic ability, which is so important to the role. When Troy insisted that he "can hit forty-three home runs right now!", Jones made you believe it. He also skillfully used his well-known, resonant voice with wide variations and contrasts, giving a rich, musical quality to the many stories—the play is full of long, set speeches—which were also enhanced by his ability for both physical and vocal mimicry, as he imitated the many real and imaginary characters he described. Jones is a wonderfully *precise* actor; the performance was full of telling detail, such as the way he would swig at a bottle of gin he was sharing with his friends, managing a big, fast swallow while fastidiously keeping the bottle from touching his lips. The role won him a Tony Award for the best performance of the year on Broadway, and one should add that he was lucky, these days, to have a role worthy of his talents to perform there.

Jones was supported by an excellent cast, especially Mary Alice, who brought ease, charm, and poignancy to the role of his wife, and Frankie R. Faison, who turned the tricky role of the retarded brother—which could easily have degenerated into something sentimental or, on the other hand, disgustingly clinical—into a performance that was deft and lyrical. Lloyd Richards directed with his usual skill and clarity, while James D. Sandefur designed the naturalistic yet evocative setting. The only flaw here was that, perhaps because it was in the inappropriate 46th Street Theatre, sightlines required the setting to be placed far downstage, which limited much of the blocking to one dimension.

Fences won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, which it well deserved. Some of its excellence, however, derives from its being part of a whole school of contemporary black playwriting, by authors such as Lonne Elder III, Charles H. Fuller, Jr., and Leslie Lee. Many of their plays are better than anything written by fashionable white playwrights like Sam Shepard, David Mamet, or David Rabe, yet they

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have received less attention and are less likely to appear in anthologies or college courses in contemporary American drama. Influenced by Ibsen and Chekhov, they realistically depict life in black America with understatement, humor, and sadness. They also show the influence of jazz, especially the blues, whose lyrics combine comedy and pathos in giving voice to the problems of ordinary black people. The intense personal relationships that are the glory of black life are made vivid for all of us.

Charles Ludlam, founder, artistic director, playwright, and principal actor of the Ridiculous Theatrical Company (reviewed here in the Spring 1987 issue) died in May. The skill, erudition, and outrageous sense of humor that he brought to our theatre will be sadly missed.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Santayana's Legacy

I PRESUME I WAS NOT THE ONLY UNDERGRADATE WHO, having misplaced the religious faith of his youth, turned to philosophy as a hopeful substitute. It was not so much to "philosophy," as to the possibility that some figure from the recent past (Aristotle, Spinoza, or Kant were too far away) might be discovered who could provide sagelike guidance on matters of intimate and ultimate concern: on first principles; the problem of substance; the essence of things. By the time I graduated from college and had submitted to the inclinations of my philosophy teachers, I had found not one but three sages who in their different ways spoke to what I thought I needed. There was William James, with his psychology, his fresh ways of thinking about truth and meaning, about "thinking"; there was John Dewey, to whom I looked for instruction in social consciousness (that never panned out); and, most elusive and most intimidating to me, there was George Santayana, guide to the Life of Reason and the Realms of Being. Santayana's prose was as richly authoritative as any I had read since the King James Bible or the Book of Common Prayer, and was as aesthetic, as literary as anyone could wish for. Many of his books were out of print, but—in addition to libraries—the bookstores in Boston and Northampton, Mass. were well-stocked with second-hand copies of those handsome maroon Scribner's editions. For as little as $1.50 you might come home with a copy of *Winds of Doctrine* or *Soliloquies in England*; *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* or *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (the titles themselves beckoned invitingly). As the years passed they continued to look good on my shelf, and from time to time I even took one of them down to read, pretending momentarily to be still a student of philosophy.

Today's students, at least the ones I've observed, have simply not heard of Santayana, a consequence of their teachers' not making him known. (Evidently he does not have the requisite rigor, is too "exquisite" to pass as philosophy, while English teachers have other, mostly Continental fish to fry from the great world of theory.) John McCormick in his fine new biography[1] claims that the neglect of Santayana "accompanies a growing consensus" that he was a great man—but I have seen no indication of such a consensus. The publication, concurrent with Mr. McCormick's biography, of Santayana's

[1] GEORGE SANTAYANA, by *John McCormick*. Alfred A. Knopf. $30.00.

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three-volume memoir, *Persons and Places*, in a single 760-page "critical edition," is a welcome event that inaugurates the MIT Press's promised edition of the complete works. But this scholarly monument to its subject may end up in libraries only, unvisited except for the occasional researcher.[2] And, like the fate T.S. Eliot said had been Ben Jonson's ("to be damned by the praise that quenches all desire to read the book; to be afflicted by the imputation of the virtues which excite the least pleasure; and to be read only by historians and antiquaries—this is the most perfect conspiracy of approval"), Santayana's acceptance as a magisterial writer of "beautiful" prose may be as deadly.

If Santayana continues to be unread it will not be for John McCormick's lack of trying to reverse the situation. His introduction sets an admirable tone for the book to follow when he says that, although he is interested in correcting recent and wrongful neglect of Santayana and in placing him historically, his "first and enduring motives were delight in his character and in his eloquence, agreement with his naturalistic philosophy, and joy at the prospect of a man of his stature who refused to puff himself and forbade others to pound the Santayana drum." It is evident that McCormick derives intense pleasure from reading his man:

> Some philosophers can bring a smile, William James and Ludwig Wittgenstein among them. Some, like Nietzsche, terrify, although not for the reasons he thought he was terrifying. Only Santayana can make me laugh aloud. Insofar as a biographer can determine, he was a happy man and his happiness was contagious . . . He was not elusive but fastidious, one whose distinctions were subtle but wonderfully available, and not only to specialists.

I don't recall ever having laughed aloud while reading Santayana, but in the course of reading the biography I picked up *Egotism in German Philosophy*, an elegant, sardonic analysis of the subject published during the first World War while Santayana was in England. Here is the opening paragraph of the third chapter, "Transcendentalism":

[2] PERSONS AND PLACES: Fragments of Autobiography, by *George Santayana*. ed. by *William G. Holzberger* and *Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr.*, with an introduction by *Richard C. Lyon*. MIT Press. $35.00. Santyana's autobiography used to be available in three small Scribner's volumes. The new edition, with a valuable introduction by Richard Lyon, is approved by the MLA's committee on scholarly editions, which means it is edited within an inch of its life. 200 of its 761 pages are taken up with notes and textual commentary, discussions of adopted readings, lists of emendations and substantive variants. The index seems to me absurd: the word "Life" is followed by page references to categories such as "academic," "and art," "his attitude toward" and on through some forty-five more including "sunny side of" and "happiest moments of."

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> Fichte called Locke the worst of philosophers, but it was ungrateful of him, seeing that his own philosophy was founded on one of Locke's errors. It was Locke who first thought of looking into his own breast to find there the genuine properties of gold and of an apple; and it is clear that nothing but lack of consecutiveness and courage kept him from finding the whole universe in the same generous receptacle. This method of looking for reality in one's own breast, when practised with due consecutiveness and courage by the Germans became the transcendental method; but it must be admitted that the German breast was no longer that anatomical region which Locke had intended to probe, but a purely metaphysical point of departure, a migratory ego that could be here, there, and everywhere at once, being present at any point from which thought or volition might be taken to radiate. It was no longer so easy to entrap as the soul of Locke, which he asserted travelled with him in his coach from London to Oxford.

My knowledge of Fichte doesn't extend beyond a categorizing label or two, but I have read enough Locke to savor that deadpan final sentence about his soul, and I can delight in Santayana's evocation and expansion of the German breast into a surveyor of the cosmos. This delight is centrally a matter of suppleness of rhythm, aptness of image, and a wry, flexible tone of discourse. Such a masterly exposition *must* be saying something true about Fichte—or so my non-specialist perception told me; and I had similarly approving and non-specialist responses to the pages on Kant and Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche from the same book.

Santayana's hospitality to readers who think of themselves as mainly—in that old-fashioned term—"literary," is indicated by the fact that Mr. McCormick teaches comparative literature at Rutgers and has written extensively about fiction. It may be true that, not being a philosopher himself, he doesn't give us a sufficient account of what the *Times* book reviewer called the "professional controversies" in which Santayana engaged—though the six hundred odd pages of this thick book, many of them devoted to Santayana's writings, will be found sufficient by most readers. The reviewer's other complaint—that McCormick is too adulatory of Santayana and that he fails to "make the philosophy clear"—seems to me quite off the mark. Most certainly he writes as a long-term admirer of the books; but as for making the philosophy "clear," that is surely not the point. We don't read Santayana and then, puzzled, go to some commentary to find out what he was really saying, what his "philosophy" or "thought" consisted of—any more than we read Proust or Shakespeare, then look up some critic to clear away our difficulties with them. In fact, McCormick's painstaking accounts of the five volumes of Santayana's early *The Life of Reason* and of the four which comprise the later *Realms of Being* (along with its introductory

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marvel, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*) were for me the least engrossing parts of the book. Paraphrasing someone whose language is as delicately itself as Santayana's, figures to be a less than rewarding occupation (McCormick himself in his introduction admits that "to paraphrase Santayana is to butcher him"). As with Proust or Shakespeare, the reader would be better advised to pick up the original and go to work. But McCormick makes us want to read or reread the books, which is what counts.

Santayana's memoir has already familiarized us with his childhood, divided between Avila with his Spanish father, and Boston where he lived with his mother and half-siblings. His days at Boston Latin School and as a Harvard undergraduate provide some of the memoir's best writing, especially for me in the account of his economic and domestic arrangements as a freshman living on the ground floor of Hollis Hall in Harvard Yard:

> . . . the rent was forty-four dollars a year. . . . It was so cheap because the cellar below might increase the cold or the dampness. I don't think I was ever cold there in a way to disturb me or affect my health. I kept the hard-coal fire banked and burning all night, except from Saturday to Monday, when I slept at my mother's in Roxbury. . . . As to my lodging, I had to make up my sofa-bed at night before getting into it . . . I also had to fetch my coal and water from the cellar, or the water in summer from the College pump that stood directly in front of my door.

With his "less than a dollar a day" spending money, he managed nonetheless to "dress decently, to belong to minor societies like the Institute, the Pudding, and the O.K. . . . to buy all the necessary books, and even, in my Junior year, to stay at rich people's houses, and to travel." (He goes on to confess, unashamedly, that a friend provided him with a set of old evening clothes so that those rich people's houses could be visited.) By the time he graduated summa cum laude, he had joined eleven different organizations, had studied with Josiah Royce and William James, and had written some seventy-five poems. After studying in Germany and traveling to Paris and Avila, he handed in his doctoral dissertation—three years after graduation—on Lotze, then settled in for twenty-three years of teaching in Harvard's department of philosophy. In that stretch, as with his later sojourn in England during and after World War I, or his last twenty-odd years in Rome, little occurred to disturb the even tenor of his ways. He produced his books at an astonishing rate, with no decline in freshness and never a touch of spirit-weariness.

Apropos of those teaching years at Harvard, McCormick is extremely interesting on the relations between Santayana and William James. He usefully corrects the notion that all James saw in his pu-

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pil's philosophy was—in James's too colorful phrase from a letter to his colleague George Herbert Palmer—the "perfection of rottenness." Santayana had admiringly reviewed James's *Psychology* the year after it came out in 1890, and ten years later James, in the letter to Palmer, began his discussion of *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion* by saying that "The great event in my life recently has been the reading of Santayana's book." James meant the phrase "perfection of rottenness" to apply to Santayana's philosophy, but others, like President Charles Eliot, thought the rot went deeper. (Eliot referred—in a letter to Hugo Münsterberg, another colleague in philosophy—to Santayana's way of life as "abnormal," which McCormick takes to be code for homosexual.)

Santayana once insisted to James that apart from temperament, they were closer than James believed. McCormick points to their both being cosmopolitan (each wrote French well—Santayana wrote and spoke it "to perfection"), to their shared reservations about the teaching of philosophy at Harvard (it was moralistic and lacked the Platonic and Catholic tradition), and to their common rebelliousness toward logic and the exalting of "technical" methodology. Both were committed, however differently, to literary ways of writing philosophy (McCormick argues that Santayana was influenced by James); both were humorous but also passionate in their way of taking the things they cared about. When *The Life of Reason* was published in 1905, James called it (in a letter to Dickinson Miller) "Emerson's first rival and successor" and a "great" book, though he found "something profoundly alienating" in Santayana's tone. In a letter to James in response, Santayana took a lively jab at Emerson who, he said, might "pipe his wood-notes and chirp at the universe most blandly," but whose "tender" and "profound" genius was certainly not Santayana's. The latter felt that no one including James had caught what was deepest in his book—the *tears* ("*Sunt lachrimae rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt*") that he shed not for the lost past but for the lost ideal, the "vision of perfection" which was so elusive. He ends the fascinating letter by saying to James, "I seldom write to any one so frankly as I have here. But I know you are human, and tolerant to anything, however alien, that smells of blood." Surely that was the right note to strike.

Like Socrates he was fond of the youth, very fond, especially when they were good-looking. When in the 1940s Ezra Pound forced himself on Santayana's attention in hopes of luring him into writing a book (along with himself and T.S. Eliot) that would reform American education, a visit from Pound was surely improved by the fact that Santayana found him to be "taller, younger, better-looking than I had expected." His earlier letter to Guy Murchie, a Harvard undergraduate friend who had conceived the odd idea that he (Murchie) wanted to get married, is an embarrassing classic of single-sex special pleading: "And besides I think marriage for

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you extremely risky. . . . It is hard for a young man like you to distinguish the charm of a particular woman from that of women in general. . . . If you could weather this storm, the very experience would strengthen you and enlighten you for the future . . ." No humor there, nor is it there in Santayana's poetry, which is rhythmically conventional and perfectly boring ("Cape Cod" is an exception). The biographer is forthright in calling it a pastiche of dictions that falls short of "genuine" art. Santayana never came to terms with the poetry of this century: except for his sudden and surprising warming, late in life, to Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle*, his approval of *Georgian Poetry 1911–12* was the last of such he bestowed.

There is no room to go into here what the biography goes into very interestingly—Santayana's conservatism and his anti-Semitism. He wrote Sidney Hook in 1934 that he loved order "in the sense of organized, harmonious, consecrated living"; for that reason, he said, rather too candidly, "I sympathize with the Soviets and the Fascists and the Catholics, but not at all with the Liberals." He went on to add that he would sympathize with the Nazis too if their system were founded on reality rather than on "will . . . therefore a sort of romanticism gone mad, rather than a serious organization of material forces." As for the anti-Semitism, it can be understood in part as yet another example of a widespread attitude among English literary people: McCormick lists Carlyle, Trollope, Meredith, Virginia Woolf ("How I hated marrying a Jew," wrote Woolf to her beloved Ethyl Smyth, "how I hated their oriental jewellery, and their noses and their wattles"). He could have added D.H. Lawrence, and this is to stop short of the Eliot-Pound-Wyndham Lewis team. But however one tries to explain it historically or biographically—Santayana grew up in the Spanish Catholic Church with its anti-Semitic catechism, and in Boston where Jews were disliked as much as the Irish and the Italians—the prejudice is, in McCormick's works, "scarcely comprehensible" emanating from the author of *The Life of Reason*. We are used to "understanding" Pound as a zealot, half-baked on various issues; Santayana should have been taken in by no such immoderate, vulgar prejudice.

It is with relief that we hear him speaking about America rather, and what was wrong with it. The following sentence from a letter of 1927 is more eloquent even than anything in his essay "The Genteel Tradition in America": "It is veneer, rouge, aestheticism, arts museums, new theatres, etc. that make America impotent. The good things are football, kindness and jazz bands." He was soft on athletics and athletes: back in his early days as a Harvard instructor he had to apologize to President Eliot for dereliction of duty when he proctored exams for the Harvard crew at New Haven. As for jazz bands, one wonders what he had in mind—early King Oliver perhaps? At any rate the sentiment is commendable.

Santayana moved somewhat in the Bloomsbury orbit during post-

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World War I years, enough at least to get invited to Lady Ottoline Morrell's, where he noted what he called Bertrand Russell's "romance" with the lady, and enough to decide that he loathed Lytton Strachey (nobody who loathed Strachey can be judged too severely). Upon reading Clive Bell's *What is Art?* with its catchword notion of the essence of art as "significant form," he henceforth referred to him as "the tinkling Bell." As early as 1921 Desmond McCarthy, Bloomsbury's omnipurpose reviewer, called Santayana "the greatest of all living critics." But the fullest case for his importance as a literary critic came from very much of a non-Bloomsbury affiliate, none other than Q.D. Leavis, whose *Scrutiny* appreciation of him in 1935 (when she also reviewed his novel, *The Last Puritan*) made a good case for his valuable service. *Scrutiny* found few critics outside their own fold who could be recommended to students of literature, and Santayana was not only named one of them but invited to write for the magazine. He did, publishing his "Tragic Philosophy" in 1936, which then became the occasion for a lively corrective of him by F.R. Leavis (Santayana didn't quite understand how it wasn't "Shakespeare" who spoke "Out, out, brief candle!" but Macbeth, a dramatic character in Shakespeare's play).

Q.D. Leavis's praise of Santayana was echoed in this magazine thirty years ago by Marvin Mudrick, who called his work "the most comprehensive, the most penetrating, and the most consistently satisfying text of literary criticism originated by any philosophic mind since Coleridge" ("The Life of Reason," *The Hudson Review*, Vol. X, No. 2, Summer 1957). The places to go to check this for its truth are to the essay on Whitman and Browning ("The Poetry of Barbarism," in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*) and the essay on Shelley (in *Winds of Doctrine*). There is the essay on Dickens in *Soliloquies in England* and—though less importantly so, I think—essays on Shakespeare to be found in various places. There is also *Three Philosophical Poets*, from which the chapter on Lucretius is preeminent. But really, if "literary critic" means somebody who writes a lot, and saliently, about literature, then I don't think Santayana has a place—along with Pound and Eliot—in the group of what Mudrick called "the three outstanding literary critics of our language in our century." (I'm not sure Pound belongs there either.) Better to think of "literary critic" as someone who writes penetratingly, with fully expressive resources, about other writers, whether or not they have composed poems, novels, dramas. Such criticism in Santayana's case would consist prominently of the aforementioned *Egotism in German Philosophy*; of the masterly *Character and Opinion in the United States*, with its brillant chapter on William James; or of the moving tribute to Spinoza in the address delivered at The Hague in 1932 ("Ultimate Religion," in *Obiter Scripta*). Moving along the line from criticism to, in Richard Rorty's phrase, "philosophy as a kind of writing," there are the belletristic pleasures of *Soliloquies in England*, and

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the challenging dialectics of *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, dialectics which—as John Dewey said rightly in his admiring review of the book—are comparable to F.H. Bradley's. And this is to ignore much, and to say nothing of systematic attempts to say it all in the *Life of Reason* and *Realms* books. Santayana himself remarked, in *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, that "The whole of British and German philosophy is only literature." Exactly the same thing may be said about his own writings, especially if we give due prominence to the ambiguities of "only" and "literature."

It is astonishing to hear from Mr. McCormick that *The Last Puritan* quickly sold 148,000 copies in America and was on the best-seller lists for several weeks. It is a book that, try as I may, I can't seem to make my way through. But Santayana doesn't need or ask to be read whole; one can be a sampler, in the best sense of that activity, and come away from even a brief visit fortified with some new way of putting things, or an old way one had forgotten about. Nobody can read him now without thinking of Wallace Stevens' "To an Old Philosopher in Rome,"[3] which the biographer quotes entire at the very end of his book (the effect is even finer than when Stevens' poem is read by itself):

> So that we feel, in this illumined large,
> The veritable small, so that each of us
> Beholds himself in you, and hears his voice
> In yours, master and commiserable man,
> Intent on your particles of nether-do . . .

The poem's final stanza beautifully captures the self-generated, wholly finished nature of the "old philosopher's" work of a lifetime:

> Total grandeur of a total edifice,
> Chosen by an inquisitor of structures
> For himself. He stops upon this threshold
> As if the design of all his words takes form
> And frame from thinking and is realized.

[3] First published in this magazine (*The Hudson Review*, Vol. V, No. 3, Autumn 1952).

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C. B. COX

Bisexual Shakespeare?

IN ELIZABETHAN TIMES THE CRIME OF BUGGERY was punishable by death. Today this legal term for homosexual intercourse offends our ears, but its use draws attention to the abhorrence with which many Christians of the time (and since) regarded physical intimacies between men. In these circumstances it's difficult to believe that Shakespeare would not only participate in an active homosexual relation with a handsome young man, but broadcast this affair to the world in sexually explicit sonnets passed round among his friends. In London society gossip would have circulated very quickly. With many influential contemporaries his reputation would have been damaged irretrievably. Such witless behavior seems so unlikely that anyone who argues that Sonnets 1-126 describe a relation between men "sexual in both orientation and practice," "clear and copious in detailing physical intimacies between them," is going to need very powerful arguments indeed.

The virtue of Joseph Pequigney's *Such is My Love*,[1] from which I quote, is that he presents a strong case for considering whether in fact Shakespeare may have behaved in this extraordinary manner. Pequigney's book is combative, polemical, at times outrageous, but very intelligent and acute in its detailed examination of individual sonnets. His arguments can be both fallacious and yet wonderfully provocative and stimulating, so that we react afresh to the dramatic and passionate intensities of the Sonnets.

The crucial question concerns the amount and meaning of sexual innuendo in Shakespeare's writings. In what contexts, for example, does "to have" imply "to possess sexually," or "treasure" refer to a woman's "secret parts"? These problems are difficult to sort out when we read Elizabethan texts; even today intelligent readers may react differently to a remark such as "I'm under Dr. Smith." Pequigney devotes a good last chapter to conventions in Renaissance love-sonnet sequences, but says little about the historical factors which make personal homoerotic references unlikely in Shakespeare's verse.

Pequigney's interpretations of Sonnets 20 and 52 are crucial. He regards Sonnet 20 as pivotal in the sequence, and devotes a full chapter to its discussion. Sonnet 20 begins:

[1]SUCH IS MY LOVE: A Study of Shakespeare's Sonnets, by *Joseph Pequigney*. University of Chicago Press. $19.95.

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> A woman's face with nature's own hand painted
> Hast thou, the Master Mistress of my passion.

Pequigney insists that "passion" in this context carries its most glaringly obvious sense, that given by Alexander Schmidt in his *Shakespeare-Lexicon* as "amorous desire" or by Eric Partridge in *Shakespeare's Bawdy* as "sexual love, physical desire." C. S. Lewis observed that the language of these sonnets is "too lover-like for that of ordinary male friendship," and confessed that he had found "no real parallel to such language between friends in sixteenth-century literature."

In contrast, Stephen Booth in his authoritative 1977 edition of the Sonnets says that on the grounds of its vocabulary this sonnet "has been carelessly cited as evidence of its author's homosexuality." Booth draws attention to the Elizabethan use of "passion" to denote poems that express strong feeling, and so reduces the sexual impact of the word.

Pequigney replies that even if "my passion" should denote "my love-lyric," which he doubts, "Master Mistress" is not thereby explained or exorcised. The literary sense of the term does not supplant the libidinal sense but in fact reinforces it. Attempts to desexualize "Mistress" and "passion" reflect the traditional scholar's unwillingness to contemplate the possibility that Shakespeare was actively bisexual.

Sonnet 20 ends with a couplet often used to support the belief that Shakespeare never had carnal relations with the handsome youth. After describing the youth's physical attractions, his feminine qualities, which Nature has created, the poem ends:

> But since she prick'd thee out for women's pleasure,
> Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure.

That "prick'd" refers to the penis is generally agreed. Pequigney acknowledges that at this stage of his affair Shakespeare rules out any hope of sexual fulfilment, but argues that this does not prevent him from expressing sexual attraction and even carnal yearnings.

I accept Pequigney's argument here because it adds considerably to the dramatic force of Sonnet 20. To deny that in this Sonnet, and in many others, Shakespeare expresses amorous feeling for the youth is to go against the implication of words such as "passion" and "Mistress," and to reduce the sequence to something more like a cold exercise in conventional flattery. Pequigney is very successful indeed when he explores the fluctuations of Shakespeare's passion, the conflicts, anxieties, hopes, jealousies and disgust through which Shakespeare the lover passes from hour to hour, from day to day.

Pequigney contends that the received arrangement of the poems in the Thorpe edition of 1609 is correct. Sonnets 1-126 are said to describe the changing amorous interaction of the two friends, while

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the Dark Lady Sonnets (127-154) take up an episode dealt with briefly in Sonnets 40-42. Each sonnet relates to those before and after, as the sequence records a relationship which develops dramatically over a period of time.

After his chapter on Sonnet 20 Pequigney moves forward to Sonnet 52. His new chapter opens with a question: "Does Sonnet 20 bring up passion at the outset only to bury it at the end, as commentators are wont to maintain, or does Shakespeare rather set the stage for amorous interaction between the two friends?" I agree with Pequigney who finds "amorous interaction" in the remaining Sonnets, but don't agree that this necessarily proves that Shakespeare carnally possessed the young man.

Sonnet 52 ends with this couplet:

> Blessed are you whose worthiness gives scope,
> Being had to triumph, being lack'd to hope.

Pequigney paraphrases this: " 'Fortunate' you are to be in possession of the 'excellence' that gives one 'room' or 'free play' ('scope'—OED 7) either 'to triumph' when you are 'had' or to 'hope' for you when you are 'lack'd.' " But what is the implication of "had"? It could mean "to own," but for Pequigney the most feasible meaning of the verb is "one recorded in the Supplement to the OED (14e), with two citations from the plays, as 'possess sexually.'" "Being had to triumph" then refers to "the feeling of exaltation attendant on carnal possession of that erotic prize. . . ."

Pequigney next looks at Sonnets 75 and 87, where "had" is apparently used in the same way. The third quatrain of Sonnet 75 uses "delight" perhaps as an allusion to sexual pleasure:

> Possessing or pursuing no delight
> Save what is had, or must from you be took.

The couplet in Sonnet 87 reads:

> Thus have I had thee as a dream doth flatter—
> In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

It's difficult to refute Pequigney's contention that in these three examples there is a sexual innuendo in "had," particularly when in Sonnet 129, which concerns heterosexual love for the Dark Lady, everyone agrees that there is such an implication. The third quatrain of this sonnet reads:

> Mad in pursuit and in possession so,
> Had, having, in quest to have extreme,
> A bliss in proof, and prov'd a very woe,
> Before a joy propos'd, behind a dream.

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This section of Pequigney's book is of considerable importance. The case is strong that in these sonnets Shakespeare explicitly refers to carnal possession of the youth.

My doubts center on the difficult question of how far the Sonnets can be taken as autobiographical. Can we go beyond Stephen Booth's comment: "William Shakespeare was almost certainly homosexual, bisexual or heterosexual. The sonnets provide no evidence on the matter"?

In his Introduction Pequigney himself asks the crucial questions about the "I" whose voice is heard from start to finish in the Sonnets: "Can we then equate the fictive composer of the sonnets, significantly named Will in Sonnets 135, 136 and at 57.13, with that (William) Shake-speare named on the title page of the Quarto, who in truth composed the Sonnets?" Because of the uncertainty Pequigney normally uses terms such as *speaker*, *persona*, or *poet* rather than Shakespeare. By the time we reach his last chapter he has grown more confident. He points out that other sonnet sequences, such as Spenser's *Amoretti* and Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, are based on personal experience. Wordsworth wrote that in the Sonnets Shakespeare "unlocked his heart." Can we really believe that the intimacies explored by Shakespeare in such depth were totally imaginary? Pequigney asks: "What is the likelihood that a writer of strictly heterosexual orientation would choose for the principal subject of his cycle the impassioned liaison of a pair of male lovers? Shakespeare not only does so but, in assigning the poet-lover his own name and authorship, he minimizes the disguise of a fictional mask. Is it conceivable that a Sidney or a Spenser would ever consider homosexual love as a subject? And if, against all odds, either did, would he have been able to achieve the penetrating insight into the dynamics of homoerotic relations that the Sonnets exhibit?"

Against Pequigney it could be said that Shakespeare's genius surpasses that of Sidney or Spenser, and that, as we all know, in his plays he shows remarkable imaginative facility for entering into the psychology of diverse men and women. Was Shakespeare's understanding of Lady Macbeth, Iago, Olivia or Lear all based on personal experience? But this argument isn't as strong as some critics would wish to believe. The decision to write 126 sonnets about male relationships is extraordinary, and Pequigney's case for some degree of personal involvement seems to me unanswerable.

This still leaves us with the question of whether the use of "to have" refers to sexual possession. The poems may be based on personal experience but still that doesn't actually prove that Shakespeare "had" the youth. There's an element of playfulness in the sexual innuendoes, a delight in wit as if Shakespeare is enjoying his own virtuosity and may not have expected to be taken literally. In the plays he indulges constantly in bawdy witticisms. In his poems to the youth he may be using sexual innuendo as a kind of joke, a

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playful but at times almost serious hint that his affection may even extend to physical desire. When we think of the Elizabethan disgust for homosexuality, it's possible his readers may have been amused by such witticisms without taking their meaning as a dramatic, serious account of what was actually happening. The conventional Elizabethan sonnet was not a realistic narrative but an exercise in hyperbole. Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare, of course, achieved greatness by transforming the medium; yet a tone of deliberate extravagance and exaggeration prevails in Shakespeare's sonnets, and may account for some of their sexual connotations.

Pequigney appeals to Freudian theory to support his detailed analyses of Shakespeare's language. He tells us that his own intellectual orientation is principally Freudian, that he finds a remarkable coincidence between Freud's theories of inversion and the bisexual psychology adumbrated in the Sonnets. In Sonnet 20, for example, Shakespeare portrays in the Master Mistress image a personage who does not, like the boy actors, play a woman's part but instead conjoined, within a single self, female characteristics and the primary male sexual organ. Pequigney refers to Freud's essays on sexual aberrations. In ancient Greece what excited a man was the physical resemblance of a boy to a woman together with the existence of masculine genitals: "Thus the sexual object is a kind of reflection of the subject's own bisexual nature." Pequigney finds this astonishingly apposite to Sonnet 20.

I partially agree, but I'm worried that at these stages of his argument the element of craft, of deliberate playfulness and wit, disappears when the Sonnets are seen straightforwardly as realistic experiences available for psychological analysis.

It's this Freudian decoding which makes me call Pequigney's book at times "outrageous." I particularly object to his interpretation of Sonnet 33:

> Full many a glorious morning have I seen
> Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
> Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
> Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy,
> Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
> With ugly rack on his celestial face,
> And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
> Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:
> Even so my sun one early morn did shine
> With all triumphant splendour on my brow;
> But out alack, he was but one hour mine—
> The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.
> Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth:
> Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's sun staineth.

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The sestet establishes the figurative status of the octave. According to Pequigney, the sun represents the youth, who has committed fellatio with someone male and unworthy. In the fifth line "to ride" incorporates the bawdy sense of "to mount sexually." Pequigney comments: "The fault of the sun-friend, then, has been to 'permit' the 'basest' cloud-man to 'ride on' his 'face,' and thus has consisted, as the gloss authorizes us to infer, of oral-genital carnality engaged in with some low type." He continues by suggesting that "mountain tops" stands for "my brow," and so "the meadows and streams should refer to lower regions—campestral and anatomical." "Meadows green," Pequigney argues, refers to the lower parts of the body, probably pubic hair, while "pale streams" suggests "seminal fluid, and the line may be paraphrased 'enriching an orgasm with delectable magic.' "

Pequigney devotes five pages to this sonnet, and I haven't done justice to all his arguments, but I'm sure they are wrong. The Freudian decoding is creating its own fantasies. I would presume that Shakespeare included "brow" for its rhyme, and that "ride" was chosen not for its sexual implication but for its visual force in depicting how clouds cross the sun. The sestet of Sonnet 33 draws the moral from this picture of nature in a manner typically Elizabethan, without consequently transforming the octave into a series of sexual innuendoes. To suggest a Freudian meaning reduces the impact of Shakespeare's lyrical response to Nature.

There are other occasions when Pequigney's interpretations reduce the impact of a sonnet. I don't agree with his comments on "marriage" in Sonnet 116:

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments . . .

Pequigney wants to limit this poem to the poet's love for his friend, who is not directly mentioned here but addressed in adjacent sonnets. For Pequigney the theme of the poem is qualified by the poems around it. On this and other occasions his interpretation of the sequence as a coherent narrative imposes an unnecessary reduction on the imaginative richness of the language. In individual sonnets Shakespeare developed ideas about time and love in general terms not limited to his specific affection for the youth. Sonnet 116 offers a supreme example of this richness, just as relevant to heterosexual marriage as to a homosexual relationship.

But let me end more positively. All Pequigney's arguments are supported by careful, scrupulous readings of the texts. He establishes conclusively that the poems reflect an intimate relation between poet and youth, and that the sexual element cannot be ignored. He will persuade many students to read the Sonnets with renewed attention and insight, and for this he deserves much praise.

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GEORGE KEARNS

Post-Colonial Fiction: Our Custom Is Different

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK. We hear of a threatening entity, the "Pacific rim," whose principal market we have become. The Japanese have rescued the Treasury from embarrassment. What will it be like, what is it like, to be a "debtor nation"? Dour heads on television warn that in our own immense way we are following Britain toward an age of humbled decline. May it be genteel, so gradual that we hardly notice, on any particular morning, what we can no longer afford. Meanwhile, there remains, at every point of the compass, the expensive, untidy, dangerous heritage of Western imperialism, which we can neither wind up nor wind down. Such is the potential for drama in memories of the colonial scene and in its aftermath—for nostalgia and guilt, bravery and aggression, ironies of manners, morals and language—that inevitably some of the most compelling modern fiction is a post-colonial pondering. Four of the more interesting books that have come my way for this review, all quite unlike each other, unite a fineness of art with post-imperial themes.

Taplinger, performing a service by keeping in print the work of Randolph Stow, has now issued in paperback *Visitants*, whose central character, Alistair Cawdor, a twenty-seven-year-old Patrol Officer in a remote sub-district off New Guinea, touches a tragic dimension rare in modern fiction.[1] Stow, an Australian who has lived in England for over a quarter of a century, has drawn upon youthful experiences in the late 1950s in what was then the Australian-administered Territory of Papua; it is now Papua, New Guinea, an independent member of the Commonwealth, although the "Kuwini" remains its head of state. In *Visitants* we hear of the Kuwini's husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, being greeted at Port Moresby by a marvelously mean, scheming old tribal chief, Dipapa—but the natives are not pleased by the Duke. They express

> their contempt for such a person who would let his wife command everything. But Mister Cawdor said what he always said: Our custom is different. And they all nodded their heads and looked wise and said: Yes, truly, it is different, your custom.

[1] VISITANTS, by *Randolph Stow*. Taplinger. $7.95p.

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Cawdor, whom we come to know by his native name, Misa Kodo, is the decent, benevolent Mistah Kurtz of this revisionist look into the heart of darkness. He is fluent in native languages, fluent, too, in the elaborate language of cultural coding through which unceasing negotiation takes place among the Papuans, among the Dimdims (whites), and between the races. In *Visitants* the delicate balances Misa Kodo tries to maintain collapse briefly into a wild outburst of destruction, orgiastic taboo-breaking sex, tribal politics and magic, all complexly involved with deeply suppressed native resentments, with millennial beliefs based in myths of "cargo" (which the Dimdims stole in that mythic past, thus gaining power over blacks), and with the apparent arrival, in a hovering spaceship, of the latest in a long line of visitants. "Let them come," exults one of the young natives, "and chase away the Dimdims. Let them kill the Dimdims, who bring nothing but disappointment and shame."

Stow's narrative method is brilliantly polyphonic, perhaps distantly reminiscent of Faulkner's in *As I Lay Dying*. We read, or hear, witnesses at an offical inquiry into strange events on Kailuana Island in late 1959. The story passes from one voice to another, from one mind to another, from voiced to unvoiced speech, in a kind of chaining that moves forward in time even as it allows intricate cross-patterns from a multitude of pasts. The Papuan witnesses include an intelligent teen-age girl who works in the house of the island's white "king"; a mischief-making Government Interpreter who has little left to interpret, since Misa Kodo speaks the language; and a young man of the future, Benoni, heir to the wily old Dipapa, who is trying to dislodge Benoni from the succession and pass it on to a shaman who may or may not be a madman. The Dimdim witnesses, one very old, one very young, are marvelously realized. The old one is MacDonnell, who has taken to signing himself *MacDonnell of Kailuana*, "as is my privilege," also known variously as Misa Makadoneli and King Mak. Proprietor of a copra plantation, he has lived on Kailuana, the only white, for more than half a century. In what sense, we have to wonder, is MacDonnell "white" any more, or to what extent does he live in a country and language of his own making?

> "I haven't been off the island for seven years, old man, . . . or out of the Territory for fourteen, and I haven't spoken English, except to the wireless, since the *Chinampa* came three weeks ago. . . . And besides, they tire me nowadays, white men. I liked young Dalwood, and even Cawdor, but they tired me. To deal with white men—here, at my age—takes thought, a lot of thought."

Finally, there is Cawdor's assistant, young Dalwood, Misa Dolu'udi, nineteen, new to the Territory, unable to speak more than a few words of the local language, unfamiliar with delicate codes of be-

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havior, only his youth carrying him past blunders and the dreaded "shame" that he brings down upon himself and others.

The story is an excellent one, in a line extending from Rider Haggard (who was by no means untroubled by the colonial scene), through Conrad and Forster, a story that ends, as theirs do, in mystery and vision. Where Stow excels, however, is in the fineness with which he registers textures of colonial interactions and the ways they shape language. It is only a crude convenience to speak of two races here, or of two languages (three, really, for sometimes Pidgin is spoken in addition to English and the islanders' native tongue). What Stow dramatizes is how races and languages modify each other in infinitely subtle gradations: everyone speaks at least a little of the others' language, sometimes a good deal; words, thought patterns and translations from one language are accommodated by the other, until they sound perfectly at home; whites and natives varyingly identify with and absorb bits of each other's culture and abandon parts of their own. It is Cawdor who has absorbed and abandoned the most, more than he can bear. He is "almost not" a white man, says the wise old MacDonnell, "Not for much longer." His epitaph, pronounced over a body "so covered with dried blood that it was unrecognizable as the body of a European," is spoken by one of the Papuans: "Now he is a black man true."

Stow's reader must move very slowly through *Visitants*; the first page can only be fully interpreted in light of the last; in fact many of this novel's subtleties are revealed on second reading, but its formal control of rhythms and its narrative variety make a second reading as rich as the first. This remarkable work is less interested in the cliché of "conflict of cultures" than in the particularity of a colonial scene, the ways it forms a micro-language and a micro-culture of its own. The reader of *Visitants* is forced to learn that language, to become an interpreter of that culture. This is one of the most intensely composed and moving novels of our time, a work that deserves the widest recognition.

Ismail Marahimin's *And the War Is Over* is a worthy recipient of the Pegasus Prize, which supports translation and publication of "works of fiction from countries whose literature is rarely translated into English."[2] Marahimin, who teaches English at the University of Indonesia, has written a straightforward narrative that almost stoically recreates a dramatic moment from his country's colonial past, the final days of the Japanese wartime occupation of Sumatra. Lieutenant Ose, a decent, sensitive, unsuccessful Japanese officer, commands a small encampment in the remote interior of the island: ten soldiers, forty-one Dutch internees, and one *romusha* (native forced laborer), all engaged in building an embankment on a river. Just

[2] AND THE WAR IS OVER, by *Ismail Marahimin*. Trans. by *John H. McGlynn*. Louisiana State University Press. $16.95.

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across the river is Taratakbuluh, a small trading center where the Muslim population observes the month-long fast of Ramadan. The war is distant; neither the soldiers, the prisoners, nor the Sumatrans know how the Greater East Asian War is faring; only the Lieutenant has a few rumors that lead him to suspect Japan has been defeated. The war has in fact ended, for the bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki a week before this story begins, but lines of communication into rural Sumatra are precarious, and no orders have arrived from the Emperor. There is a curiously moving pathos that falls to the reader: we watch the characters go on with their lives, making important decisions they would not make if they knew what we know. The Dutch prisoners effect an escape into uncharted jungle only a few minutes before the Lieutenant would have informed them that their captors had lost the war. Their destination is an almost mythic village deep in the jungle, a village from which it is said no visitor has ever returned. The war ends, the book ends, we never find out if they reach that village or return from it. Yet the imperial imagination dies hard:

> "Listen to that!" [one of the prisoners] cried to his friends in Dutch. "There's only a hundred people there. That would mean about half men and half women. We'd have the women to ourselves. The men could be our servants."

He is also convinced that after the war, "The natives are sure to want us back." (Indonesia gained its independence shortly after the war.) The real interest of *And the War Is Over* is less in the irony of the situation than in the details of daily life, particularly in the Sumatran village where both Japanese and Dutch roam freely as they do their shopping. Here the Muslim population, both prosperous and poor, goes about its business, trading, praying, worrying about making the best marriage for a daughter, almost as if there were no military occupation. The finest scene in the novel recounts Lieutenant Ose's trip to the provincial capital to learn the Emperor's commands. He and his fellow officers pass through an eerie landscape in which they increasingly know what their fate is to be, as they observe that "there were no Dutch prisoners of war at work." At the meeting where they hear of the surrender, they weep openly, then several commit suicide on the spot. The others go off and get drunk. Marahimin is a remarkably restrained, undidactic writer. Japanese and Dutch visitants are portrayed as variably decent and malevolent. The tone is simply, "These people were here, they did what they did, now they are gone."

Henri Lopes is a Francophone intellectual who served for over a decade in the cabinets of several governments of Congo-Brazzaville. His *The Laughing Cry* (more finely balanced in the French *Le Pleurer Rire*) is a bitterly satirical portrait of an African "big man" dictator

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most closely resembling Idi Amin Dada, but in whom it's easy to find reflected follies and disasters of an all-too-long list of leaders which would include, for starters, the "Emperor" Bokassa, Bongo of Gabon, etc., etc.[3] (And why limit the list to Africa, when we've had, closer to home and more lavishly supported by us, such splendid members of this club as Magloire, Trujillo, Somoza and the Marcos duo?) It would be comforting to think that the target of Lopes' acid memory—Colonel, soon General, soon Marshal Hannibal-Ideloy Bwakamabé Na Sakkadé ("Call me Daddy")—is an inch larger, a shade more grotesque than life. One fears he is not.[4] The clownish side of such a figure is mercilessly chronicled: waving a lion's tail before international conferences staged in his capital; importing an Yves St. Laurent-type tailor-couturier to create instant mass-wardrobes for himself and his First Lady; throwing fistfuls of paper money (with his face on it) from the window of his limousine; "encouraging" the populace to sing songs like "When Daddy came down from on high"; convoking a conference of psychics and sorcerers from every corner of the globe to help him track down a rival whom his own secret police can't uncover; believing that the Chivas he drinks all day (and no other liquid) is scientifically proven to contain "a certain product" that permits "concentration of the vital faculties"; assuring that whenever he leaves the country all cash in the Treasury comes along. Lopes is good at minute comic observation: bodyguards "enraged at being torn from their comic books"; and at burlesque invention (I hope it's invention): Daddy's wish to achieve an oratorical style of "Niggers' balls in the language of de Sévigné." He is clever in his swipes at *négritude* and certain strains of African cultural ideology (however Left his politics, among Africanists he is considered a "cultural conservative"); at the chatter of the capital's young intellectuals; at the rhetoric of supine press and television; and at the ideological mazes through which anti-Communist, pro-African Unity minds can justify simultaneous alliances with China and South Africa. But Lopes, increasingly as the novel proceeds, is less interested in comedy than in expressing despair at post-colonial politics. It may be momentarily amusing to hear that "discussion at a very high level" means "unanimous nodding of heads," and that the "opinion of the president, in a modern and well-organized state, is a decree," yet the realities behind the amusement are

[3] THE LAUGHING CRY: AN AFRICAN COCK AND BULL STORY, by *Henri Lopes*. Trans. by *Gerald Moore*. Readers International. $16.95.

[4] A fascinating study (through 1975) of the syndrome behind Lopes' fiction is Samuel Decalo's *Coups and Army Rule in Africa: Studies in Military Style* (New Haven, 1976), with a chapter on the tangled history of "big man," cum "scientific socialist"-neocolonial-militarist-tribal styles in the governments of Congo-Brazzaville under within which Lopes was member of the Politbureau and Revolutionary Court of Justice, Minister of Education, Foreign Affairs, Finance, and Prime Minister. One awaits the memoir.

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grim: prisons, confession by torture, show trials, public executions, massacres; moral, financial, intellectual and linguistic corruption. Lopes spares the reader none of these, so *le rire* refuses to balance *le pleurer*. Nor are horror and despair kept at a distance by sophisticated self-reflexive techniques in which the worst criticisms that can, presumably, be levelled at this novel are voiced in the opening pages by a Swiftian censor, and in which the exiled narrator's manuscript is subject to comment and revision by other actors in the drama. Readers International operates under the rubric of publishing "works that have suffered political censorship or were written in exile," which leaves me wondering about Henri Lopes' present relations with Congo-Brazzaville and with his own activist past; he is now a high official in UNESCO. In *The Laughing Cry* there is an idealistic "young compatriot Cabinet Secretary" who, secretly and ineffectually, promotes the Marxist future as he works at Daddy's side. In exile, he admits to having made "a grave tactical error in accepting government posts," yet he "never stops asserting that the people suffer under [such] tyranny; that they will one day awake, because they love revolution and the tradition of resistance to oppression; that the health of the nation resides in the people alone; that there is no such thing as a supreme savior . . ." I am unable to decide what irony, if any, is supposed to reside here. Certainly the massive evidence that supports this fiction, and the novel's emotional weight, make the young Cabinet Secretary's fine sentiments sound a distant utopia indeed.

In Jim Crace's *Continent*, an old Siddilic calligrapher, supreme master of his art, under assault by an irresistible combination of politics and commercialism, comes to think, "The quest for meaning in form belongs to an age long past."[5] In the best of these tales Crace's writing belies this; he achieves that combination of ease and finish that merits the term classicism, a classicism shaded with Virgilian melancholy. Unfortunately, Crace's publisher, claiming too much for him, is in danger of claiming too little. To arrive at these stories we pass a distracting barrier of publicity hoping to convince us that *Continent* is a novel (it is not, nor is there any reason why it should be, except, I suppose, that novels receive attention short stories or tales don't); that it is some sort of post-modern favor to compare Crace to writers like Borges and Calvino (it is not); and that his continent is an "invented" place, which "refers as well to the underlands of the human psyche, to the collective unconscious of the human race" (the continent is clearly modern Africa, and it bears the same relation to Crace's stories as does New Mexico to Willa Cather's, Barchester to Trollope's, the classical world to Guy Davenport's—that is, the writer has felt something deeply about it, and has transformed it). "And after reading *Continent*," writes a poet

[5] CONTINENT, by *Jim Crace*. Harper & Row. $14.95.

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manqué at Harper & Row, "we gaze at our imaginations in the same way we gaze into a fire." Now, now.

The best of these seven stories are about the passing of ancient ways as they became "inconveniences" in the neocolonialized eyes of natives on the make. In "Talking Skull" a student tries to disguise the source of the money that pays for his scientific education, Rome-cut trousers and Spanish-leather shoes: his father sells freemartin's milk (they don't give milk) to country people who believe in its powers of sexual potency and fertility. The student's embarrassment decreases rapidly when a modern businessman shows him how to rationalize his potential inheritance through understanding the continuity between superstition and trade. In "Sins and Virtues" the old calligrapher, whose forgotten art is suddenly fashionable in Paris and Chicago, is forced into elaborate deceptions by government officials wishing to line their Swiss bank accounts. In a wonderfully sad-funny tale, my favorite, electricity comes to a rural village, and with it the wonders of blenders, "table lamps with New York skylines as a friezed motif," and a catastrophic ceiling fan. You know that as soon as the first switch is pulled, the little town is doomed as surely as the one on Keats's urn. Crace's stories are delicately inventive elegies for the local, the odd, the inefficient, the native, as they give way before international junk and its economic and ideological bases.

Being grown up means accepting the ways of the world, doesn't it? One I still find hard to take is that a so fine book as Bengt Söderbergh's *The Mysterious Barricades*, because it has no mainline publisher behind it, because it is unsupported by a network of contacts, lunches, interviews and ads, can easily fall into silence.[6] Söderbergh is a Swedish writer who has lived for thirty years in the South of France. His lovely and, in the end, heartbreaking elegy for Provence, published in England in a beautifully written translation, is imported by an enterprising firm, Dufour Editions, which sends out review copies that go unreviewed. So I am recommending, to anyone who takes pleasure in a writer's virtuosity, a novel that will scarcely be found on shelves of libraries or bookstores. It tells the life of a Sicilian peasant girl, Teresa, who is brought to a village in Provence just after the First World War; is adopted by two very "twenties" lesbian ladies, one American, one English, who rebuild, maintain, and allow to decay, an old house called the Bishop's Palace. Teresa falls in love with a fascinating young shepherd named Max who claims to be a Mayan; becomes a harpsicordist (Söderbergh writes splendidly about music); works with the French Resistance; and lives on into an eccentric, embattled old age. Across this

[6] THE MYSTERIOUS BARRICADES, by *Bengt Söderbergh*. Trans. by *Eivor Martinus*. Peter Owen, London. United States distributor, Dufour Editions, Chester Springs, Pa. 19425. $22.50.

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chronicle of lives interwoven with each other and with a place, Söderbergh, like an enchanted magician, produces characters and scenes that overflow with surprising details and illusions of presence. Provence in all its aspects—its flora, its peasants and villagers, its resident bohemia and moneyed idlers (many of them "real")—rises before our eyes. Lives develop in unexpected directions across long spaces of time. One of the lesbian ladies, who is *not* supposed to be the artistic one, becomes a successful writer; while the American sculptress, who has lived the great days of the "Amazon" Natalie Clifford Barney's Temple of Friendship in the rue Jacob, putters in her studio—always with the High Dedication of the Twenties—at what sound like hopelessly inert works. The glamorous, flawed Max falls in with Nazis and collaborators in occupied Paris—a grotesque mileu marvelously imagined by Söderbergh. Teresa studies under a high priestess of the harpsicord—and we feel this must be *exactly* what it was like to have worked with Landowska. The author's love for Provence, his encyclopedic knowledge of its lore, its history, its "celebrities," is darkened by a sense of landscape and culture falling before modern clutter and brutality. Söderbergh knows how much lives are shaped by economics and history, but he knows more deeply how they shape themselves in unpredictable ways. This is a novel about the sadness of things passing, and their wonder while they are here. I am only sorry that so many readers will spend time with X, Y and Z (here fill in the names of some well-known contemporary writers) and miss the Nabokovian pleasures of Bengt Söderbergh.

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HARRY GOLDGAR

Only Connect! Guy Davenport in the Modern World

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, Allen Tate's Phi Beta Kappa address at the University of Minnesota, 1 May 1952, was published in these pages. It was called: "The Man of Letters in the Modern World."[1] Tate considered the man of letters as a discriminating citizen of a "free society," with important responsibilities to the community. (There was more talk of the role of the writer in a "free society" in those days of the Cold War than there is now, and Tate read excerpts from his address later that month at a Congress for Cultural Freedom conclave in Paris.) He concluded, sweeping very broadly:

> But the true province of the man of letters is nothing less (as it is nothing more) than culture itself. The state is the mere operation of society, but culture is the way society lives, the material medium through which men receive the one lost truth which must be perpetually recovered: the truth of what Jacques Maritain calls the "supra-temporal destiny" of man. It is the duty of the man of letters to supervise the culture of language, to which the rest of culture is subordinate, and to warn us when our language is ceasing to forward the ends proper to man. The end of social man is communion in time through love, which is beyond time.

So far as I know, Guy Davenport has never anywhere defined the man of letters or his duties or position: instead he has spent his life taking culture as his "true province" and, more especially, "supervising the culture of language." He *is*, more than anyone else I can think of, "the man of letters in the modern world," in Tate's universal sense and also in the somewhat narrower European sense, in which, for instance, "homme (or femme) de lettres" is a common "occupation" to be printed after one's name in the Bottin, Paris's equivalent of the Yellow Pages. Poet, art critic and literary critic, translator, essayist, fiction writer, illustrator of his own books, inventer of a genre (his "documentary" story that is simultaneously fact and fiction and that has spawned a platoon of epigones), Guy Davenport "practices" as our archetypal man of letters in the generation after Allen Tate.

[1] Allen Tate, "The Man of Letters in the Modern World," *The Hudson Review*, Vol. V, No. 3, Autumn 1952.

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His new collection of twenty essays—half the number of the 1981 collection, *The Geography of the Imagination*—takes its title, *Every Force Evolves a Form*,[2] from a Shaker motto. It means "that form is the best response to the forces calling it into being," or that "A work of art is a form that articulates forces, making them intelligible." In a study of Joyce's symbolism, he remarks that Joyce's principle is "the imaginative bonding of images in an harmonic pattern," and continues, "This is the method of all art, and one artist differs from another in the quality of invention with which he bonds one image to another."

It seems to me that this is precisely Davenport's own artistic principle: "bonding," or connecting, astonishingly disparate or various images or, it may be, curious facts, in the "harmonic pattern" of the essay. It is what makes the critical essays, even the relatively brief reviews, works of art. It is also, of course, the trait for which he is most noted and which his imitators cannot replicate because, though they may be good writers, they don't *know* what he knows, cannot associate or "bond" as he dazzlingly can. Writing about Montaigne's journal of his travels, for instance, he gets to talking about Montaigne's necessary preoccupation with his kidney stones, which "locate[s] his journal in a time when the body was still part of personality. Later, it would disappear. Dickens' characters, for instance, have no kidney stones because they have no kidneys. From Smollett to *Ulysses*, there is not a kidney in English literature." A few pages later, situating Montaigne in a time of renaissance, transformation and regeneration, he is reminded of Plutarch, of Montaigne's conversation about Plutarch with other scholars and gentlemen one day in the Vatican library, and develops the "uncanny resemblance between the mayor of Chaeronia in the first century and the mayor of Bordeaux in the sixteenth." All this is pure Davenport, connecting.

He has read, of course, absolutely everything: in one essay he introduces us to the mimes of Herondas, a Greek writer of about the third century B.C., of whom thirteen satiric playlets (seven intact, six fragmentary) turned up on a papyrus scroll unearthed by tomb robbers in Egypt in 1890, and offers us his own translation of one into American; in another he produces an entertaining analysis of O. Henry's *Cabbages and Kings* and its curious relation to Conrad's *Nostromo*—which, he finds, O. Henry was actually rewriting—"indeed, translating"—so that when the two are brought together we have "a lesson in literary genetics." But his unqualified admiration is reserved for the two great modern masters, Joyce and Pound, and especially Joyce, whose layers of associations and connections, whose twists and turns of image and symbol, we would naturally expect him to admire (for his study of these has clearly influenced

[2] EVERY FORCE EVOLVES A FORM, by *Guy Davenport*. North Point Press. $16.95.

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his own style) and to be expert in explicating. There are moments when Davenport, in talking about Joyce and the "interpenetration of figure and ground," might almost be talking about his own stories, infinitely less strenuous than the *Wake* but in their fashion equally allusive: "It is as if Joyce recognized an elective affinity among images, however metaphysically witty, and hoped they would bond together in a kind of poetic chemistry. Whether the reader is missing something by not finding these recondite allusions is like asking if one can fully appreciate Chartres while being ignorant of its engineering, its history, and the iconography of all its sculpture."

Davenport is not shy about calling the explication of such difficult literatures—tracing the "genetics" of the often (but not necessarily) hermetic text—"decoding." In his Washington and Lee University lectures of 1985, "The Artist as Critic," "The Scholar as Critic," and "The Critic as Artist," which form the heart of this book and one of the most explicit statements available of his creed as a High Modernist, he makes clear that decoding is the critic's honorable and main function. To discover that Yeats in the Crazy Jane poems was remembering, "half consciously let us say," a poem of Meredith, and to work out the analogies, proving once again that "Spontaneous generation is as uncommon in art as in nature," delights him, as he expects it to delight us. "The arts," he explains, "are a way of internalizing experience, allowing us to look with wonder at a past that is not ours, but enough of ours so that all stories are, as Joyce says, always 'the same anew.' It is not therefore surprising that the best books are old books rewritten."

Davenport, scholar-critic, narrates at some length his experience in "decoding" Charles Olson's "The Kingfishers." He went about this detective work "with the sense that I could not say that the poem is great until I understood it." It is an attitude that is certainly familiar to those of us who may have done a stretch at a liberal arts college at any time during the last five or six decades—yet there is something troubling about all this joy in decoding, this delight in puzzles and riddles. What becomes of all the writers whose books are not like Rubik's Cubes? How does all the "easy" literature fit in? Guy Davenport tells us that William Carlos Williams (whose code is easily broken) is a great writer; but the inference is always that the Pound of the *Cantos* or the Zukofsky of "A" or, of course, the Joyce of *Finnegans Wake*—the eccentrics who demand that they be decoded to be read—are the true masters.

One may ask such questions, but Davenport will proceed with his enjoyment of the game. "Zukofsky's critic, or scholar, has a very specialized task. So does Pound's, and Joyce's, and many another's." In these cases the critic is "practically a subcreator, or even collaborator." Writing that must impress into service a cryptographer-critic, who can reveal its "collage of texts": that is modernist writing,

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the kind of writing that Davenport studies, explicates, admires. He even "would go so far as to say that all modern writing is about some other text, and that this is so much the case that many writers are guardedly furtive about it, while knowing that their only hope of meaning is in our ultimately finding that other text." One can scarcely stick one's neck out farther than that.

Guy Davenport is a painter, draughtsman, and illustrator who speaks with the authority of an insider about art and artistic reputations. Just as when he writes about literary texts, the essays here on Henri Rousseau and Balthus insist upon close reading of the paintings. In "What Are Those Monkeys Doing?" he shows how reputable art historians and museum cataloguers have thoroughly misunderstood Rousseau's *Les joyeux farceurs* of 1906 because they simply have not looked closely enough at what is happening in the picture. He demonstrates how Rimbaud's "A la musique," the opening paragraphs of Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, and Apollinaire's "Annie" are equivalent to scenes by Rousseau, and winds up with stanzas of his own inspired by Rousseau's *Portrait of Pierre Loti*: this is all good-humored and apparently digressive, but, like the more strictly iconographic remarks in the piece, it is making the point that "The elements of Rousseau's style send us off our familiar scholarly paths, and open up explorations."

Davenport's observations clarify once and for all Rousseau's famous "primitivism," a label which does not mean that Rousseau's "feeling for traditional iconography" was not as alert as Picasso's, but merely that "When Picasso changes styles, he knew exactly what he was doing. . . . Rousseau did not: this is wonderfully useful to our knowledge of how tradition combines innovation and rules from the past to invent new forms."

En route to this discovery, we have learned: That in certain pictures Max Ernst and Robert Delaunay are quoting, or appropriating, Rousseau. That Grove's Dictionary used to define Charles Ives as a primitive composer. That about the time Rousseau painted the *Football Players*, the Baron Coubertin, founder of the Olympics, was lecturing on the *bonheur* of physical exercise (and that the game in the painting is rugby). That "Rousseau is the first to paint an airplane, the Wright Flyer No. 2, exhibited at Le Mans, 1909." Connections! Another eminent man of letters, Donald Davidson, once told me, "It is a curse upon the modern world that we cannot think of one thing without thinking of everything else." That "curse" is the charm and the glory of a Guy Davenport essay.

The essay on Balthus, another "primitive," or at least another autodidact, is an equally original kind of art criticism: a meditation on Balthus's children and adolescents, on childhood and adolescence as states of being, and on adult attitudes toward these creatures, in literature and in the culture at large—with reference espe-

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cially to one painting, *The Street.* "The child in Alain-Fournier, Proust, Colette, Cocteau—" and, the inference is, in Balthus—"inhabits a realm imaginatively animated with a genius very like that of the artist. Children live in their minds." Thus the adolescents in the street scene (there are also adult figures, but they are less interesting) resemble those in the roomscapes "who take poses that are erotically suggestive, ambiguous, tentative of symbolism. There's the same vagueness of purposelessness in Cocteau and Proust: the love scenes between Marcel and Albertine are all purest Balthus." We are invited to look at the painting through the spectacles of the man of letters, the cultural historian, the psychologist—and the artist.

There is much else in these essays that I have scarcely space left to touch on. There is a vivid appreciation of Lévi-Strauss, who, in interpreting the primitive, becomes "the best and most diligent interpreter of our time." There is an essay that for the first time anywhere recognizes the wide spectrum of influences on E. E. Cummings (not the wisest but the "wittiest of American poets"), from the Greek lyric to Krazy Kat, from Mallarmé to Joel Chandler Harris. We become acquainted with the Reverend Sydney Smith, who is responsible for fifty-two entries in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* ("twenty-eight more than Mark Twain"), the first resident clergyman his parish had had for 150 years: "When, in his first sermon, Smith struck a cushion for emphasis, the dust that flew out obscured his view of the congregation." There is a discussion of Beckett's play *Company* that reveals that "In a sense *Company* is Beckett's reply to Deirdre Bair's biography" (in the writing of which he neither helped Bair nor stood in her way). There is an approving essay on Nabokov's lectures on *Don Quixote.* (But is it really "a crude old book full of peculiarly Spanish cruelty?")

Toward the end, there is a fascinating group of essays on American themes. "In That Awful Civil War" offers a fresh view of the old myths about slavery and Grant's drinking ("His idea of war was that you killed the enemy. When you had killed all of the enemy, the war would be over"). "More Genteel than God" is an amusing study of Noah Webster and his prudish dictionary. "The Peales and Their Museum" walks us through the history of this eccentric and wonderful Philadelphia family. The title essay, "Every Force Evolves a Form," turns out now, late in the book, to be a classroom lecture, "reconstructed from notes on a scrap of paper," that starts with Poe's raven and ends with a survey, making all the connections we have come to expect—Keats's nightingale, Shelley's skylark, Olson's kingfisher, Hopkins's windhover—of "birds taken to be *daimons.*" "Imaginary Americas" discusses the peculiar notions of these States that abide in the minds of English residents like D.H. Lawrence and W.H. Auden.

But the one of the American group that lingers longest is a fierce little powerhouse of an essay on what we are doing to the environment: "Making It Uglier to the Airport":

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> Poland survived the Second World War better than my hometown in South Carolina. Main Street has rotted into a wasteland. Gracious old homes came down to make way for used-car lots, tacky little finance companies, and drive-in hamburger pavilions. The seven ancient oaks that stood around the house where Thomas Wolfe's sister lived fell to the power saw, and the house itself, deporched, hoked up with neon and Coca-Cola signs, was islanded in a desolation of tar paving and converted into an eatery called, with that genius of the destroyer for taunting, The Seven Oaks. Some two miles of magnolia shade became a glare of festooned light bulbs, and all the used-car dealers are named Shug and Bubber, a semiology I am not equipped to explore. . . .

The sly humor, the grin that shows through the anger, is characteristic of Guy Davenport too. It is a gift for mimicry and mockery and fun, an affair with the comic muse, that some of our other famous men of letters—our Longfellows, our Tates, our Edmund Wilsons—rarely or never displayed. It is one of Guy Davenport's several captivating modes of being literary in the modern world.

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JAY PARINI

The Power of the Text

> Love of power, in its widest sense, is the desire to be able to produce intended effects upon the outer world, whether human or non-human.
>
> —Bertrand Russell

IT WAS BOUND TO HAPPEN, SOONER OR LATER, that the new ways of reading loosely gathered under the post-structuralist and Deconstructionist banners would begin to affect the teaching of literature in American universities. That, until now, nobody has explored exactly *how* these approaches might be useful in a classroom situation owes something to the fact that these "new" ways of confronting texts have not really seeped into the minds of the average English instructor raised on the techniques of New Critical analysis codified by critics such as Cleanth Brooks or Maynard Mack, the "old" Yale School, who drew on earlier work by John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, I.A. Richards, and William Empson. The New Critics, of course, stressed the isolation of the text, which was subjected to various kinds of structural and rhetorical investigation. The search for ironies and oppositions was central to this approach, as was a deference to "literary" language, seen as an elevation or refinement of ordinary speech and writing. The poem or novel became, in the words of W.K. Wimsatt, a "verbal icon," with all the quasi-religious layers of association implicit in that phrase. The professor became a kind of high priest (or, occasionally, a priestess), ministering to students who sat, respectfully if dumbfoundedly, before imposing reifications of the Tradition like *The Norton Anthology*. As Matthew Arnold predicted it would, literature supplanted religion.

For a decade, at least, the New Criticism has been in bad odor, though numerous critics, such as Gerald Graff, have shown that the new ways of reading are just extensions of the old ways. The search for oppositions and ironies, the unmasking of ambiguities, and the notion of texts undermining and countermining themselves, are all part of the New Critical approach, though a trendy vocabulary has come into being, one that—unfortunately—seems designed to make the priesthood of professors even more remote from students and "lay" readers. We now gargle polysyllables such as *praxis*, *aporia*, *logocentric*, *topos*, and so forth. An issue is "problematized," a given narrative "thematized." Poems and stories become "texts." The world, too, becomes a "text," as logic and common sense give way to mad Gallic exaggerations (as when the High Priest himself, Jacques

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Derrida, utters this wonderful piece of nonsense: "There never has been anything but writing"). But again, it was all there in the New Criticism: the "privileging" of critics over writers and "lay" readers, the "encoding" of critical language, so that only initiates (those with the Ph.D.) could read the books about the books. What is new, however, is not unimportant: the post-New Critics won't have anyone "privileging" poems and novels over other texts, such as phone books and magazine ads. Why not, as Roland Barthes does, take a Billy Graham tent meeting as a "text" and criticize it?

It's almost too easy to make fun of the post-New Critics, who are various and definitely *not* a "school." In fact, they pretty much hate each other, with each new wave of readers "deconstructing" the previous wave. The Intentionalists, led by E.D. Hirsch, will have nothing to do with the Deconstructionists, and vice versa. Terry Eagleton, a post-structuralist Marxist (and the best of the lot, in my opinion), cuts a broad swath through almost every current school in *Literary Theory* (1983), his brilliant introduction to the current critical scene. The Yale Critics—Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller—seem terribly out of date already (they are dismissed summarily in the book under review). Harold Bloom looks increasingly like an eccentric post-Emersonian "visionary" with few ties to any other critical school. And poor Stanley Fish, the leading exponent of the "reader-response" school of critics, seems hopelessly at sea, preaching to a shipload of disciples who refuse to believe a text means anything except what the critics themselves, as an aggregate, imagine it to mean (one reader isn't enough for Fish: it takes at least two to construe).

Many instructors of English throw up their arms in frustration and continue to search for ironies in poets, such as Donne or Herbert, who were canonized by the New Critics because their poems were amenable to New Critical techniques of reading. But this is a mistake, as this important new book by Robert Scholes makes clear.[1] In *Textual Power*, Scholes demonstrates in three central chapters how the new ways of reading ought to be used in class. "I wish to face as squarely as possible the question of what the recent wave of theory can actually offer us in the way of advice about what to teach and how to teach it," he says, adopting a remarkably candid tone that surfaces throughout the book, sometimes rather comically, as when he makes a statement, then follows it with a personal remark in parentheses, as in: "If I am right about this (and I admit it is debatable though I am prepared to debate it)." But even the qualifications add to the tone (a tone reminiscent, oddly enough, of F.R. Leavis, who used qualifications as a way of signaling his seriousness and the agony of his effort to understand a given passage). One

[1] TEXTUAL POWER: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English, by *Robert Scholes*. Yale University Press. $5.95p.

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feels that Scholes, throughout, is genuinely *struggling* with a difficult and immensely serious topic—and he is. Overall, he does convince us that recent critical theory *is* relevant to the classroom teacher, which means that the new theories are relevant to readers in general.

Among the most important new theorists are the Feminists, and Scholes helps us to understand how the Feminist approach relates to post-structuralism; Foucault or Barthes, for instance, resemble the Feminists in wanting, as readers, to go beyond the simple analysis of surface structures and to "get at" the underlying cultural codes that serve to hide the prejudices in a text. Adding a Feminist twist to a post-structuralist reading of Hemingway, Scholes focuses on *In Our Time* for demonstration purposes in chapter 4, looking specifically at "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot." "The assumed audience here is clearly male," he says, noting that in Hemingway women are always "girls," that the text presumes a certain attitude toward "girls" (leering) that most women would not find comfortable. The text exerts, as Scholes notes, a power over us that we must submit to or resist:

> If we accept the textual pleasure proffered by the passage before us, if we enjoy this humor, we are in the text's power for as long as our pleasure lasts, and our codes are subordinated to those of the text. Only a critical act can free us from this power. An important part of the teacher's function in a literature classroom is to show students how to move from reading the text to interpreting and criticizing the codes that sustain the text's implications.

This is, perhaps, obvious stuff, but it's terribly important. Our literature, and the culture that sustains it, is ruinously male-biased, and biased in favor of groups in society who possesses power, which as Bertrand Russell says (see my epigraph), involves the capacity to produce intended effects in the real world (I resisted the annoying post-structuralist tendency to bracket words like *real*). If teachers teach students to interpret the world, there will be less of the usual nonsense about the ivory tower versus the "real" world that students commonly accept as true and teachers too often accept as possibly true.

Some of the new ways of reading can and should, as Scholes demonstrates, empower readers to "read" the world beyond the book, to unmask power structures in society, in politics, and elsewhere. But this application of theory to practice becomes untenable without a belief in some correlation between words and their putative referents. In a fascinating chapter called "Reference and Difference," Scholes confronts the question of word/world correlation with boldness and clarity. His intention, as he says, is to "undo, or at least cast doubt upon, the fundamental structuralist and post-structuralist view of language as a system of pure differences." He attacks the

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theory of language developed by Ferdinand de Saussure early in this century, in which linguistic systems are seen to consist of "only differences, without positive terms." That is, sound differences (as in the words *tan* and *man*) are the only differentials that mark out meaning. The assignment of these sound values is entirely arbitrary, dependent only on an internally consistent network of relationships. Working from this cardinal insight, Saussure went on to develop a complex working program for modern linguistics, stressing a *synchronic* approach that saw language as a system of relations existing at a particular point in time. Such a system renounces or suspends the old-fashioned historical or philological approach of previous centuries. It is essentially structural, attempting to isolate larger patterns. *La langue*—the general network—takes precedence over *parole*, the isolated utterance. The Saussurian method underlies the approach of critics such as Paul de Man, Derrida, and Jonathan Culler, for whom words or *signifiers* connect arbitrarily to things or *signifieds*. Derrida transforms the word "difference" into *differance*, pointing gleefully to the infinite train of unintended or non-intended significations that make any text a maze of accidental meanings or "traces." In a brilliant section of chapter 6, Scholes goes back to the philosopher C.S. Peirce, who noted that the construction of meaning requires *three* elements: a sign, its object, and its interpretant. This "tri-relative" notion of meaning-production or "semiosis" places Peirce in a line with other thinkers, such as Gottlieb Frege (who influenced Russell and the early Wittgenstein so profoundly), Rudolf Carnap, C.K. Ogden, and I.A. Richards. Scholes draws the following lines of relations:

Frege	Expression	Sense	Reference
Carnap	Expression	Intension	Extension
Ogden/ Richards	Symbol	Thought	Referent
Peirce	Sign	Interpretant	Object
Saussure	Signifier	Signified	———

Reflecting on this chart, Scholes writes: "The Saussurean formulation, like many 'linguistic' views of language, eliminates the third term and with this gesture erases the world."

Scholes stands firmly in a tradition of epistemological common sense that runs from John Locke and David Hume (whom he quotes to great effect) through Russell and Wittgenstein, though he is by no means blind to the problems inherent in this world-view, which tends to overestimate the ability of language to comprehend and manipulate the world without being itself "written" (as Derrida says) and manipulated. Looking primarily at the critical work of Frederick Jameson, the neo-Marxist critic who would like to "historicize" all criticism, he meditates on the attempt to recover a sense

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of the referent. "The problem is not really a matter of the referent but of reference," says Scholes, "it is not a question of whether the world exists but of whether we can perceive it or refer to it adequately." In the concluding paragraph of chapter 5, after a lucid summary of the anti-empiricist bias of recent theory, Scholes says that we shall "have to make some attempt to rescue the referent, to rehabilitate reference itself, before moving on to a new textual practice—and must do this without falling back into naive assumptions about the empirical object."

In spite of many fine things in *Textual Power*, the book suffers from many of the preconceptions and clichés about writing and criticism that have made the "new" theory suspect among, especially, "real" writers—that is, people who "construct texts"—i.e. poems and novels. The problem partly stems from an overly mechanistic notion of the creative act among post-structuralists, one that *ipso facto* "privileges" writing over reading and therefore sends professional readers (critics) bananas. The nineteenth-century industrial metaphor of production and consumption is all wrong for reading and writing, as any working writer or working reader knows. A writer is not a machine, taking raw materials and transforming them through an observable process into finished "products." Similarly, a reader does not merely consume a product. Scholes knows this, but he seems somehow stuck with the metaphor.

In his maddening first chapter, "The English Apparatus," Scholes writes: "The way out of our dilemma here [the production/consumption one] is first to perceive reading not simply as consumption but as a productive activity, the making of meaning. . . . The writer is always reading and the reader is always writing." The point that reading is necessarily "creative" is well taken, but to literalize the metaphor is to obscure a fundamental distinction between textuality and non-textuality. Having not maintained this distinction, Scholes finds himself making the usual nonsensical statement in the next chapter, where he asserts that the "response to a text is itself always a text. Our knowledge is itself only a dim text that brightens as we express it." In what ways is it possibly useful to describe disembodied, "pretextual" knowledge as a text? Yes, we *must* "privilege" textual knowledge over non-textual knowledge, if only because it is organized and visible and, thus, susceptible to analysis and criticism. The famous Derridean line, "*Il n'y pas de hors-texte*," is—like so much of his work—all sparks but no fire.

Scholes is also very keen to support the popular notion that evaluation is a job for book reviewers, not "real" critics, i.e. those who uncover the hidden codes in a text. He writes: "The 'great books' are not all belletristic, and if belletrism falls, then any text may be studied in an English course. And who is to say that Locke or Gibson is less valuable than Dryden or Gray?" First, whoever said Locke and Gibbon *were* less valuable than Dryden or Gray? Scholes,

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and the new theorists, rightly want to expand our notion of "great books." The canon has been perversely limited to books that flatter men and support the power elites. But to assume that the search for value in literary works is meaningless is to reduce criticism to a crude form of anthropology. Critics—including book reviewers—must continue to say, "This book is better than that one, for the following reasons," just as we must all, as citizens, continue to say things like, "No, we will not support groups that kill peasants in remote tropical countries, even if U.S. corporations do find their profit-margins for those countries suddenly less viable." Criticism does matter, and the world does exist, within and without textuality. Scholes knows this, and for the most part he does succeed in making certain aspects of the new theory applicable to classroom teaching. His book, however, would have been better had he managed to shake off some of the fashionable clichés.

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DICK ALLEN

Shrinkages and Expansions

THE TERM "OCCASIONAL VERSE" traditionally has been used to denote poetry written for a specific purpose to memorialize a specific time, such as a birthday or a ship launching. Although it can be in any form, serious or light, verse of this sort is most often thought of as minor poetry, its sentiments seldom transcending its occasion. Unfortunately, it seems to me that the term can be used to describe most contemporary lyric poetry: pleasantly expressed one-level, non-persona verse of no lasting significance.

A valid function of such occasional verse in the last three decades has been to hold the individual consciousness up against the homogenizing elements of the technological and post-technological society, to assert the particular and specific, the human against the blur of the bland. However, modes of fashion in poetry have time spans limited by overgrowth. There are times when overgrowth must be sacrificed, much as lemmings must march to the sea. We seem to be at such a time. Confessional lyric free verse, which is primarily occasional in that its stress is on the specific and the personal rather than on the universal, has given us such better-than-average poets as Richard Hugo and Anne Sexton. However, it has also given us thousands of quite equally-praised mediocre poets and hundreds of thousands of mediocre poems (often "Workshop Poems"), until the imitative mediocrities have all but crowded out the originals.

One way history removes the mediocrities from serious critical concern is by shifting perspectives. There is a recent precedent. Such a sea death took place when what is popularly called "academic" or "new critical" poetry was supplanted by the "Beat," "Black Mountain School," and "new surrealist" poetry—thousands of rhymed poems falling from the cliffs with little ironic cries. And such seems to be happening now as New Formalism makes open form and naked poetry seem too easy to compose, self-indulgent, sentimental and narcissistic—would you believe "old fashioned"?

It would be a mistake, however, to think our poetry is wholeheartedly returning to the metaphysical. What is happening is actually the combination of a renewed interest in traditional form, in dramatic and narrative elements, and in subject matter much wider in scope than that associated with the formalism of the forties and early fifties—an expansive poetry, more didactic and even religious than we would have thought poetry could be again in this century.

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Charles Martin's new collection may provide a good example.[1] No doubt about it, Martin is a formalist, and his poems—many of them sonnets—rhyme throughout. He is a poet who believes in the difficult challenge of "Speech Against Stone," where he poses against obliterations caused by history "The legends of the heart's lust for joy and violence / In waves that break upon but will not soften / The cliffs of obdurate silence." He does not ignore social realities; in the bitter "Easter Sunday, 1985" he imagines Christ in South America, "perhaps with those who were disappeared, / Broken and killed, flung into some ravine / With his arms safely wired up behind him" and when he speaks in "Grace, Secrets, Mysteries . . ." of the children of Fatima and asks, "who will heed the warning / Of these devout, uneducated children?"

But it is in the book's excellent closing series of allegorical sonnets, "Making Faces," that his gifts for form, narration, and subject come fully together. We watch a parade where "someone in a horse's head" is "holding up a sign which says, THE WORLD, / As though the world were next in their procession, / Or their procession were the world instead." As the sequence and parade proceed, we contemplate the end of the world:

> Yet we still think of it as an abstraction,
> Something that isn't likely to take place—
> Although it's taken place at places called
> Guernica, Hiroshima, Buchenwald.

And finally we learn how we might "Fight the End of the World," to make "faces at appalling forces," and build "things so that they cannot last / Unreasonably long," along with other telling suggestions.

Martin's rhymed sonnets and narratives, his willingness to make statements, his social consciousness, his refusal to write occasional verse, mark him as one of the finest younger poets of our time.

Thomas Lynch is a poet whose first book[2] includes, yet readily expands beyond, the occasional. Lynch, we are told in a book cover evocation, "gets his living as an undertaker in the small Midwestern town of Milford, Michigan." But although in a poem "Like My Father Waking Early" he speaks of his profession, his is not a mournful but a lively, thoroughly interesting, confident and highly skilled poetry which ranges from such loving portraits as "Woman Gardening" to the fine mockings of "Michael's Reply to the White Man" and "For the Ex-Wife on the Occasion of Her Birthday."

[1] STEAL THE BACON, by *Charles Martin*. The Johns Hopkins University Press. $14.95; $7.95.

[2] SKATING WITH HEATHER GRACE, by *Thomas Lynch*. Alfred A. Knopf. $14.95; $8.95.

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Four poems, spread throughout the book, tell of what seems to be an alter-ego, "Argyle the sin-eater," who considers "the innocence in all / God's manifold Creation but for Man." Others show Lynch's gift for lyrical first lines, such as "My wife undressing in the moonlight sleeve by sleeve" ("Venice"). Throughout the volume, Lynch explores and describes ordinary lives, with faint echoes of E.A. Robinson's moods. Ordinary living, ordinary duties keep Lynch's figures going, as in "Noon on Saturday" when singing "the same song over and over . . . / . . . keeps me intact," or in "Marriage": "He wanted her mouth to fill like a bowl with vowels, / prime and whole and indivisible, O . . . O . . . O . . ."

The book's longest poem, "Learning Gravity," shows formal patterning and willingness to make statements: "everything that breathes requires death. / A fierce affection is a thing like death. / Love begets love, then life, then death." Unlike Martin, Lynch is not consistent in rhyming, preferring to let lines rhyme here and there as a sort of filigree added to a regular meter; but, like Martin, his work is not obsessively personal: it tells stories, delights in being inside the lives of others, ranges well in true and vivid language.

Would that the same could be said about Richard Jones's first collection.[3] Jones, the editor of *Poetry East* and of the anthologies *Of Solitude and Silence: Writings on Robert Bly* and *Poetry and Politics*, gives us mainly occasional imagistic poetry, signaled by these lines from the book's first poem, "The Bell":

> In the tower the bell
> is alone, like a man
> in his room,
> thinking and thinking.
>
> The bell is made of iron.
> It takes the weight
> of a man
> to make the bell move.

Pardon me, but my response to writing like this is generally, "Aw gee, really?" And ditto for such cliché lines as these from "Times Like This": "the emptiness / which will survive / in the solitude of desire, / and for the rough grace / which illuminates the soul." Or from a poem so dreadful it's laughable, called "The Insects": "When I write / the insects come / to bother me / . . . . But I have work to do. / I brush them away. / I don't mean to kill anyone, / but sometimes their bodies / leave brown smudges / on the paper under my hands." Urk!

The book's final section contains such poems as "The Miscar-

[3] COUNTRY OF AIR, by *Richard Jones*. Copper Canyon Press. $8.00p.

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riage" ("The day we lost the baby"), "The Waiting Room," "The Hearing Aid," poems about the tragic death of a young boy and of how the boy's relatives respond. It seems mean to criticize poems about such subjects and events, but nonetheless it must be pointed out that sentiment ruins most of them, and except that they don't rhyme they have much in common with Victorian poetry on the same personal and mournful subjects, poetry written before Eliot and Pound's modes turned the Victorian masses of mediocre poets into lemmings.

"The Broken Bowl" is unfortunately too characteristic, illustrating many of the faults of easy contemporary poetry, from the pathetic fallacy ("I believe it wants to tell me / something about sorrow") to the mismanaged comparison ("as if I were holding the dead body / of someone I loved") to the ridiculousness of putting the bowl/body together "with a white glue that looks like sperm" so the bowl will "learn again / to love itself" to the *really meaningful* closure: "The dark vein will always remain. / The bowl on the table has been broken / and will never be the same." The book's back cover carries laudatory comments by Dave Smith and David Ignatow.

Richard Jones might write a better second book. But James Tate has now published his ninth collection,[4] and this one is basically a self-indulgent exercise for which there is no excuse. Oh, one can read Tate as he probably wishes to be read, translating each incident of verbal goofing around and extreme surrealism into "as if" expressions, so that we feel the poems are actually significant comments on the banality of contemporary existence. Yet after one does this, the feeling that these are mainly smarty-pants nonsense poems, going for the easy chuckle and the virtuoso dance of language, comes back in force. It's kind of fun to explain Tate, to note the social significance of a nephew chained to hotels, the playful longing of "A Beer Ain't Got No Bone" when "I can't pick up the vacuum cleaner / without remembering our most subtle / and tender moments." And the poetry *does* illustrate a modern reluctance to let oneself be serious about something for too long, as in the end of this stanza from "The Dead Man's Medicine":

> I think of the waves of friends, for it is true
> they come and go in waves—the little ones gone
> forever and so forth. Several pink hams must be
> delivered immediately!

However, this is occasional surrealistic poetry, written with the fingernails on stumps of fog.

Stephen Dobyns is another poet whose work, during a public

[4] RECKONER, by *James Tate*. Wesleyan University Press. $17.00; $8.95.

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reading, would give the audience a good time.[5] But these poems, unlike Tate's, are thoroughly interesting, evocative, startling and moving.

Form, for Dobyns, does not appear to be a major concern. The poems are virtually all written with a somewhat flexible three stress line capable of carrying the tales easily, allowing Dobyns to tighten or loosen a given story as he sees fit, to provide vivid anecdotes, splash in some humor, or slow the pace into a meditative finale. It's a narrative form akin to the poems of Edward Field, generally written in a casual relaxed tone and often beginning with phrases like "A man is hitchhiking. The devil picks him up." From these, something interesting always develops. We hear stories about a man cremating the ashes of ten women, including his mother, using them for fertilizer; about a general and a tango singer fighting a fire with bullets and song; a restaurant full of ghosts of the chickens which were eaten there; a man, wife, milkman and dog playing Russian roulette, and on and on. Continually, Dobyns exposes the need to accept the unusual, to ask such questions as "Why am I selling ten thousand ballpoint pens?" ("The Invitation"). A man is "constantly being squeezed / between the world and his idea of the world" ("Spiritual Chickens"). We are even led to understand the man who brings home a dying motorcyclist, rather than taking him to a hospital, so the man and his wife can watch the death—it cuts life's boredom; it's better than TV. Yet, as in "Bowler's Anonymous," ordinary people bowl, strike, and

> . . . feast on those brief moments when something
> becomes perfect—like a curled wave, Beethoven
> quartet, or the wind hitting a dandelion clock—
> one of those moments when the world seems to stop
> and everything conspires to push some fleeting
> beauty—ripening peach or blossoming rose—
> to the queer brush of perfection, where it flames,
> flickers, fades, and is never perfect again.

Dobyns elevates the ordinary, just as he brings down the mighty in these satisfying anecdotal fables. It's not lasting poetry, but it sure is damn good storytelling!

Christopher Buckley gives us his fourth collection of poems, and they're quiet, carefully thought-out works.[6] Buckley writes the kind of incremental layering longish poem we now most associate with Philip Levine, meditations which come to graceful and wise closures. The form varies little throughout the book, and the tone is

[5] CEMETERY NIGHTS, by *Stephen Dobyns*. Viking/Penguin. $18.95; $9.95.

[6] DUST LIGHT, LEAVES, by *Christopher Buckley*. Vanderbilt University Press. $12.95; $7.95.

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gentle, wistful, melancholy. Buckley is quite self-absorbed, given to drifting through memories, and very fond of giving us advice which sounds like it is the lulling and wearying advice of an old wise man with tears in his eyes. Come to think of it, maybe this is not so much poetry *per se* as it is very well-controlled and rhythmic writing. The closing lines of "In the Rain Easing" provide a typical example:

> . . . I hear off the Pacific
> that does not long for the body of the world,
> a voice that tells me to believe finally
> in the rain easing, in the one
> water-drop desiring nothing more
> than to wear smooth a spot in the stone
> and give back its portion of the light.

Also typical is this from "Works & Days": "We could almost be older men, we drink our beers / so quietly, breathing our lives out into thin clouds / which gather on the cold and dusk," and from other poems phrases like "flagging afternoons" and "not that there is all that much to say" and "And I wanted to tell you that our dreams / which are surely dust, are still our dreams."

Although Buckley has a moving poem called "Why I'm In Favor Of A Nuclear Freeze" where two boys kill a rabbit "simply because we had the guns, because we could" what bothers me about his more typical kind of nostalgic, sweetly sorrowing wisdom (a lot of poets go in for it these days) is that it's so absolutely good and kind and right, so gracefully phrased and imaged, that the reader finally either unenthusiastically nods or wanders away.

A sameness of tone is also found throughout the poems in Pattiann Rogers' new book,[7] but the subject matter of this volume is so major and the understanding so important, that the poems actually form one long sequence of stunning meditations on the nature of life in the universe. Rogers has absorbed the philosophical and theological understandings stemming from recent theorizing in modern physics and cosmology, and has here translated them into enlightened meditations and questings, visionary excursions.

Light pours through the universe and all is conceived of as wonder, from "the simultaneous opening and closing / Composing the first hardening of moment when heaven first broke / From wholeness into infinity" ("The Pieces of Heaven"). All shimmers, is simultaneous. As she writes in "The Possible Suffering of a God During Creation": "Think of the million dead stems of decaying / Dragonflies, the thousand thousand leathery cavities / Of old toads, the mounds of cows' teeth." She loves listing, naming, sees humans uni-

[7] THE TATTOOED LADY IN THE GARDEN, by *Pattiann Rogers*. Wesleyan University Press. $18.00; $9.95.

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fied with nature, "our hands bound up together with darkness and the moon" ("A Daydream of Light"). She defines her quest in "Love Song":

> Don't you know
> This is precisely what I seek, mad myself
> To envelope every last drupe and pearl-dropped ovule,
> Every nip and cry and needle-fine boring, egg drooping,
> Spore-rich tassle of oak flower, all the whistling,
> Wing-beating, heavy-tipped matings of an entire prairie
> Of grasses, every wafted, moaning seed hook
> You can possibly manage to bring to me,
> That this is exactly what I contrive to take into my arms
> With you, again and again.

Rogers brings a wonder of thought and feeling to our poetry. Hers is a book to be read very slowly, perhaps a poem a day, a fitting companion to the writings of such as Daniel Hofstadter, with poems such as "Inside God's Eye" that should find their way into many studies of science and religion. The total consciousness is a triumph of sensual comprehension.

The Selected and New Poems from two of Wales's leading contemporary poets, Tony Curtis and Leslie Norris, are now available in this country and both are important collections. Curtis, winner of the 1984 National Poetry Competition from Great Britain, in his strong new narrative and dramatic monologue poems far surpasses his early poetry.[8] That early work was pleasant, good description, but contains non-transcending poems about his father, ordinary remembrances.

In the new poems, Curtis escapes the obsession with the self and family. He has opened to the wider world, and his new stories and monologues let us hear the voice of a man mourning the loss of his old country, "The last candles of my Russia / guttering and going out under the black sea" in "The Last Candles"; a man telling a story in a concentration camp in order to win two bowls of soup, recalling how his "grandfather's kiss is rough and soft like an apricot" ("Soup"); and makes us experience "The Death of Richard Beattie-Seaman in the Belgian Grand Prix, 1939" with its touching lyricism:

> With the fire dying, the pain dying
> the voices blurred beneath the cool licks of rain.
> To be laid under the cool sheets of rain.
> A quiet with, just perceptible, engines roaring
> as at the start of a great race.

[8] POEMS: SELECTED AND NEW, by *Tony Curtis*. Story Line Press. $15.00; $8.00.

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In "Boxes" we hear of a World War II flyer bringing the belongings of his mid-gunner on "the long, slow train back to Wales" when "The fields were turning to stubble, with hay bales / and then, wonderfully, caught in one swirling field of rye / a mass of the brightest poppies." Curtis has come into his own and must, with these new narratives, be reckoned as one of Britain's leading poets.

Leslie Norris has also achieved stature.[9] He is a poet obsessed with seasons, particularly winter, and from the outset of his poetry the world "old." Many of his works are elegies and laments, as in "Autumn Elegy" with which his book begins:

> Young men of my own time died
> In the Spring of their living and could not turn
> To this. They died in their flames, hard
> War destroyed them. Now as the trees burn
>
> In the beginning glory of Autumn
> I sing for all green deaths as I remember
> In their broken Mays, and turn
> The years back for them, every red September.

There is a continually muted phrasing and lack of surprise in Norris' verse, and much nostalgia, thinking of the dead in the world wars, and "hearing the cry of owls" ("The Old Years"). Yet Norris feels it is "clearly / right to praise the living" ("At Usk"). He is skilled at rhyme, evokes nature well. In "Bridges" we hear the story of a soldier who built a "laughable wartime bridge over / some unknown river . . ." And then the contrast of a simple wooden sleeper bridge built over a stream: "I like such bridges best, / River bridges on which men always stand, / In quiet places. Unless I could have that other, / A bridge launched, hovering, wondering where to land." Norris is a satisfying poet, this calm book containing many excellent poems such as "Skulls," "Winter Song," "Belonging" and the rhyming of "Seven Poems from the Welsh of Dafydd ap Gwilym."

The collected poems of two of England's major contemporary poets, Charles Tomlinson and Geoffrey Hill, have recently been published. Here, I only have space to venture some preliminary appraisal. Although Tomlinson's book,[10] collecting his work from 1955 to 1981, is a rich offering, perhaps the reader new to him would be better served by a Selected Poems, for surrounding such noteworthy poems as "On a May Night," "The Scream," "Charlotte Corday," "Machiavelli in Exile," "Prometheus," "Eden," "A Medita-

[9] SELECTED POEMS, by *Leslie Norris*. Poetry Wales Press. Distributed in the U.S. by Dufour Editions. $9.95p.

[10] COLLECTED POEMS, by *Charles Tomlinson*. Oxford University Press. $29.95.

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tion on John Constable," to mention only a few, are scores of minor pieces, many descriptive and what I've called "occasional verse." Tomlinson shows many American influences, Stevens, Williams, and Creeley among them, but he brings to whatever form he chooses his own solid and absorbing consciousness. A poem, for him, is an exercise in seeing and sound: "The hooves describe an arabesque in space, / A dotted line in sound that falls and rises" and

> . . . space vibrates, enlarges with the sound;
> Though space is soundless, yet creates
> From very soundlessness a ground
> To counterstress the lilting hoof fall as it breaks.
> "Poem"

Tomlinson is a master of both short and middle length forms, from the imagistic and perfectly controlled "Hyphens" and "On a Landscape by Li Ch'eng" and "Parsnips" to the prose poem "The Insistence of Things": "It takes so long to become aware of the places we inhabit. Not so much of the historical or geographic facts attaching to them, as of the moment to moment quality of a given room, or of the simple recognitions that could be lured to inhabit a paragraph, a phrase, a snatch of words—and thus speak to us."

The reader of this book will find Tomlinson ranging England and America. In "Dates: Penkhull New Road" he finds "Something had bitten a gap / Out of the stretch we lived in" and he ends the poem with "I write to rescue / What is no longer there—absurd / A place should be more fragile than a book." He's knowing, humorous sometimes. "At Barstow" he encounters "At the motel desk / . . . a photograph of Roy Rogers / signed. It was here / he made a stay." Throughout, Tomlinson is loyal to his idea of how carefully poetry should render and praise, and his lyrics, his narratives, his descriptively thoughtful poems peel back layers of perception.

Geoffrey Hill's difficult poetry,[11] harking us back to T.S. Eliot and John Crowe Ransom, has recently received tremendous praise. The reasons for this are many. In the first place, he is an academic poet, a scholar's poet, an unyielding formalist; his work runs counter to the loose and occasional free verse of the last thirty years. At its best, his poetry is brilliant, highly allusive, exceedingly crafted within a narrow range of traditional rhyme schemes; at its worse, it is crabbed, pompous, obscure, pretentious, the rhythms with their heavy spondees and trochaic variations on the iambic quite wooden. Reading Geoffrey Hill is often like sitting in a heavy threadbare library chair, the lights dim on the gloomy bookcases. One does not read him for pleasure—he is meant to be studied and explicated, and the many notes at the book's close encourage such a

[11] COLLECTED POEMS, by *Geoffrey Hill*. Oxford University Press. $18.95.

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practice. Even if we do not like or enjoy reading Hill's elegiac poetry, we are forced (or bullied by such as Harold Bloom) to respect it.

There is no doubt that Hill has written some exceptional poems: "Genesis," "In Memory of Jane Frazer," "The Guardians," "Ovid in the Third Reich," the fourth, seventh and eighth sonnets of "Funeral Music." But much of the rest of his work, although it contains magnificent phrasing, imagery, and hymnal music, is so dense, so intellectual and obscure, so obviously meant to be *important*, that it commands but the kind of respect one offers in lieu of love. It is a studied lofty poetry on such subjects as "The Lowlands of Holland," "History as Poetry," "An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England" (containing "A Short History of British India").

The noted "Mercian Hymns," such a scholar's treasure trove of allusions, even granting their rhapsody of naming and their well-crafted auditory and visual imagery, seem to me mainly a hodge-podge of fragments simply juxtaposing historical past and childhood present.

Still, "The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy," despite the backward pull of its quatrains, is a great work:

> The brief celluloid clatters through the gate;
> the cortège of the century dances in the street;
> and over and over the jolly cartoon
> armies of France go reeling toward Verdun.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Landscape is like revelation; it is both
> singular crystal and the remotest things.
> Cloud-shadows of seasons revisit the earth,
> odourless myrrh borne by the wandering kings.

This magnificent exploration of war, religion, intellectual ferment and influence and mystery holds the language in the high place so many occasional poets do not even attempt to reach. And despite my feeling that too much of Hill's work consists of minor and forgettable intellectual exercises, this long poem and a too few others remind us how paltry, how loose, how undemanding most of the poetry—especially American free verse poetry—of the last decades has been.

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ANDREW HUDGINS

What's My Line? A Poetry Chronicle

ONE OF THE CRUCIAL QUESTIONS for contemporary poets is simple and troubling: what's a line? After all, the line is the one thing that clearly separates poetry from prose, but since the rise of free verse the whole issue of what constitutes a line has been up in the air. The early free verse writers in English—Blake, Whitman, Lawrence—wrote such long lines one can't help wondering if they wanted to put off the decision of when the line should end. Though the line longer than six beats has been out of favor for the last fifty years or so, as the free verse tradition in English has yielded to (or assimilated) the French tradition, the long line seems to be making a comeback in the work of C. K. Williams, Rodney Jones, and others who are, perhaps, spurred on by Neruda. For all that, most lines written by poets these days are shorter than a blank verse line. A substantial number of poets, of course, stick to the iambic tetrameter or pentameter lines that have been the workhorses of English-language verse for the last thousand years. But the free verse mode now in the ascendancy contains between three and six accents and ends, usually, where a mark of punctuation falls or where a breath pause comes, with occasional breaks against the pause to keep things interesting, alter the rhythm, or create a particular effect. Poets' explanations of their own free verse prosodies, like William Carlos Williams' description of his "variable foot," tend toward a spuriously scientific definition that does little to conceal the impressionism behind a "metric" that cannot be convincingly replicated by other writers, though the results—the poems themselves—can be superb or even, as in the case of Williams' poems, great. Holding in mind the question of what a line is, it is interesting and instructive to examine seven new books of poetry and observe how their authors have, as a practical matter, addressed the problem in the mid-1980s.

It's no coincidence that the current revival of narrative verse is happening at the same time that there's renewed interest in formal metrics. Free verse, almost by its nature, strains toward the lyric. Because it constantly has to earn its status as poetry, it can rarely relax and let the beat carry it through exposition or, say, a leisurely unfolding of character. That's why there are so few free verse long poems that don't use a collage technique. Narrative, on the other hand, has to modulate because a story has several stages to go through and different levels of intensity to develop. As one would

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expect from the co-editor of *The Reaper*, a journal dedicated to promoting contemporary narrative poetry, Robert McDowell's *Quiet Money* is resolutely narrative.[1] As Joe Bob Briggs, the drive-in movie critic, says of movies he especially approves of, in McDowell's poems "there's no plot to get in the way of the story."

Most of the poems in *Quiet Money* are blank verse or in a flexible combination of loose blank verse and iambic tetrameter that allows McDowell to incorporate exposition and dialogue—he's especially adept at dialogue—without losing the power of the poetry. "Quiet Money," the eleven-page title poem that makes up the middle section of the book, is a fascinating poem about a pilot who, before Lindbergh, makes solo flights across the Atlantic to bring back bootleg gin. Since the cargo is illegal, he can't of course take credit for the flights. Back safely from Norway, he tells his girlfriend Betty:

> I pushed it to the limit on this run.
> I let myself stay up all hours
> And then I couldn't hold it off—
> The Sandbag Eye—I saw things. . . .
> I saw another plane. A reflection, I guess,
> But that's what shook me most. Listen,
> I got a bonus for the quick turnaround.
> It's more than we've ever seen.
> Why don't we get hitched?
> Just don't make me give it all up.

He lands to find that the plane he thought a reflection of his own was, in fact, Lindbergh making his celebrated solo flight across the ocean to France. But McDowell's real story, shrewdly, is not Joe's flight but his coming to terms with Lindbergh's great fame and his own obscurity. His anguish and resentment are strongly and convincingly portrayed. By a bit too happy a coincidence, though, Joe is one of the pilots who join the search for the kidnapped Lindbergh baby. The resolution to his envy of Lindbergh comes when, back home from searching, he looks at his sleeping daughter and feels gratified that his lack of fame and wealth keeps her safe from kidnappers. For an otherwise compelling poem, the end seems just a little strained psychologically.

Other fine poems in the book include the powerful "The Cop from Traffic Control"; the touching "Into a Cordless Phone"; and the funny, affectionate, and ultimately serious "The Liberated Bowler," which is about a man who marries a woman because she can bowl well and then takes to drink as she outstrips him on the lanes. But the masterpiece of the book is "The Origin of Fear." In the tightest blank verse in *Quiet Money*, McDowell tells a story in

[1] QUIET MONEY, by *Robert McDowell.* Henry Holt. $9.95p.

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three parts. Part one tells of a boy who, on a trip with his mother, sees a series of five billboards, all showing "images of Grieving After Death" in an attempt to make speeders drive more carefully. The boy has recently lost his father, the mother her husband, and they are both affected by the billboards. The woman cries and "the boy will never sleep the same again."

In part two, the story shifts to the painter of the billboards and how painting them led him to a religious conversion when he realized how he could affect the lives of other people. When the members of the State Highway Commission came to view his work, "I felt as John the Baptist must have felt / To see the waders changing as they came. / I knew then what my life was all about. / My signs went up." With the billboards he could only "reach / the few that drove that way," so he reads the Scriptures and takes an elocution class at night to "master words," which he'll need to reach a larger audience. Though the implication is that the preacher is fascinated by his ability to affect people in a way he never could as a struggling, serious painter who shared an L.A. studio with Jackson Pollock and also that he's not over-interested in the gospel's message of salvation, McDowell never condescends to or scorns him. In the final section of the poem, the boy who was so affected by the billboards, now a man of thirty-two, turns on the TV and hears the "accusing, urgent voice" of the preacher. As the poem concludes, he is oddly mesmerized by that voice:

> [He] wonders why he just can't go to bed.
> He curses the sleep, for him, that lies ahead
> And thinks of words he said above a casket,
> His hollow mother, rigid, facing him.
> He rubs his eyes then drops his hands and stares.
> *Unbeliever! I know I'll pay for it.*
> He witnesses, he moans, he fears his bed.

Much of the power of this stunning, compassionate poem derives from its tight and muscular blank verse. As the end of the poem nears, the lines become more emphatically end stopped, leading up to the three short sentences all contained in the last line. The result is a hair-raising conclusion. In the page margins around "The Origin of Fear" I find I've made, repeatedly, this critical appraisal: "Wow!"

If McDowell is at his best when his blank verse is tightest, Alan Shapiro is at his considerable best when he moves away from formal metric. Shapiro's first book, *The Courtesy*, was written almost entirely in a fine, supple blank verse, but the poems were often emotionally constricted. In *Happy Hour*, he has loosened his blank verse considerably and he also works with iambic tetrameter and hexameter, as

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well as some very loose accentual lines that shade into free verse.[2] By and large, the loosening of the line seems to have aided in opening up the emotions in the poems. Most of the poems in *Happy Hour* center on male and female relations. But unlike Chaucer's Wife of Bath they speak not so much of "the woe that is marriage" as of its complexity and fearful ambiguity. In the title poem, a woman in a bar slides her hand up her husband's thigh and, deliberately playing the "bad girl," asks him, "My little prig, don't you want / to fuck me?" What the man actually wants to do in response to the taunt is "to smash the wine glass in her face / so he can know for once / exactly what he's done wrong." Instead he restrains himself. And even if his wife topples her wine glass onto the floor, he knows he will

> go down on hands and knees
> and wipe it up, kind and forgiving.
> In all ways careful to acquit himself
> so that tomorrow when she says
> she doesn't deserve him, he's too good,
> he can believe her. Tomorrow
> will be *his* happy hour. There won't be
> anything she wouldn't do for him.

"Extra," a similar story of marital discord, tells, in rough tetrameter, about an old married couple to whom everything has become a tool to use against the other. The emotional honesty of "Extra" and "Happy Hour" is even more evident, and chilling, in "Other Hands"—a poem about childhood jealousy. At school, the class pet, a rabbit, is given into the care of a different child each day. When it's the speaker's turn he is tender and attentive, but "the rabbit was never mine enough." The next day, another child gets to hold the rabbit. The speaker, feeling forgotten by the animal, waits until the room is empty, then he reaches into the cage, "scraping the rabbit through the hard door / over and over, for its own good, / so it would not forget." As the punished animal crouches in its cage, the speaker looks on in satisfaction:

> its shivering repeated
> there was now no hiding place,
> repeated there was no place now
> anywhere inside it that I didn't fill.

Liz Rosenberg, in *The Fire Music*, demonstrates that a poem can be clearly free verse while availing itself of many of the strengths of

[2] HAPPY HOUR, by *Alan Shapiro*. University of Chicago Press. $16.00; $7.95.

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traditional meter.[3] Consider the opening four lines of "The Bells of Saint Simon," the first poem of the book:

> I sail into the crooked gloom
> and steer to bed beneath the shining tent
> of paint we are experimenting with
> and lay this poor drunkard down.

Except for the insertion of "poor" in the fourth line this passage is completely iambic, though the number of accents per line varies. And the established rhythm is violated in such a way that the word "poor" gets more weight and more tenderness than it would otherwise receive. Throughout the poem, the overall iambic rhythm is diverged from and returned to with a mastery that suggests an artist utterly in control of what she does. The poem ends this way:

> Five times the church bells break
> the violet elements to gold,
> three notes a bird calls in reply
> as I press both hands against one booming heart;
> church music and his breath
> pulling like oars against the dark.

Among the many felicities of these lines, which remain overwhelmingly iambic, I want to point out the deft use of spondees in the first line to emphasize the tolling of the bells and the subtle inversion of stress at the beginning of the last line, which occurs at just the proper point to emphasize the act of pulling.

These are small, exquisite poems, mostly of domestic life, suburban life—things hard to write about because they seem mundane. But Rosenberg writes about them very well indeed in poems like "Elegy for a Beagle Mutt," "Married Love," "Children: 4th of July," and "A Suburban Childhood."

The book, though, is full of moments when the mundane swings open on the eternal, when the mythic is suddenly revealed as the fundament on which our lives are built. "Endless Love" opens in a hospital room:

> Let me lay my hand on the Reaper's head
> at the moment of death, when the curtains part
> for mourners drawn to the feet of the still sleeper.
>
> The River Styx tonight lies overlapping Baltimore,

[3] THE FIRE MUSIC, by *Liz Rosenberg*. University of Pittsburg Press. $12.95; $6.95.

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a city languorously shining. And the body, worn
thin as a shell makes its last journey.

We the living feel the wave creep by
which carries it off.

The movement of the poem across its lines, and around and about an iambic rhythm, is nothing less than masterful—as is the dwindling of the line from iambic pentameter in the beginning to a three-beat, accentual line by the final three lines. The poem ends with the survivors on shore, "flecked with foam" from the River Styx:

Gathered into a knot, and flecked
with foam, loom the survivors:
the bright souls, immortal lovers.

I'm also enchanted with how the poem evokes the feel of English Renaissance love poetry while being entirely contemporary and unsentimental.

The first half of Nancy Schoenberger's *Girl on a White Porch* is written in blank verse, or more commonly, a free verse that owes strong allegiances to blank verse.[4] As the title suggests many of these poems are about a longing for the lost innocence of a Louisiana childhood. Though they seem like early work, they have many charms: a sharp ear for assonance and a gift for evocative image. But the blank verse is too confining for this poet's ear, I think. And the book makes a wrong turn before it finds itself, which happens in the fourth and final section. The third section, the one I think is a wrong turn, consists of five poems based on Italian paintings. The iambic pulse has been abandoned, but the free verse in this section collapses into prose because it cannot contain all the detail and intellectualizing that the poet stuffs into it. The poems *are* highly intelligent readings of the paintings; but they choke their lines with thoughts and impressions and images that don't come together because they are more willed to completion than woven into whole poems.

But the final section of the book comes together impressively. In "By Certain Waters" the free verse rhythms incorporate the iambic pulse when they want it and shift away from it with confidence and grace when they want a different rhythm. The superb sense of assonance that vanished in the poems about Italian paintings is back and is now allied with an intriguing use of repetition. The longing for innocence is no longer tinged with a desire to escape adult re-

[4] GIRL ON A WHITE PORCH, by *Nancy Schoenberger*. University of Missouri Press. $6.95p.

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sponsibility; it's more mature. The ending of "By Certain Waters," which is also the ending of the book, is visionary and lovely:

> By certain rivers
> women are given over to weeping;
> derelicts drink alone or in pairs
> to still the beautiful harpies;
> by certain rivers
> men loading granite onto flatbeds
> feel the living resistance of granite;
> runaways from the Midwest see their deaths
> in the eddying waters, the cottonwood
> nodding like horses; by certain rivers
> boats are unloading their precious cargo—
> cows, sheep, pigs; by certain rivers
> we came down and the men surrounded us,
> taking us in their arms, their bleached
> suits glowing, all the women waving and crying
> for those who were coming, those
> who were going away.

The poem delicately alludes to and draws some of its power and cadence from Psalm 137, the psalm of the Babylonian captivity, which begins, "By the waters of Babylon, / where we sat down and wept, / when we remembered Zion."

Of the poems we've looked at so far, Maureen Mulhern has the least allegiance to the iamb.[5] Hers is a free verse that was raised on the free verse of the masters of the twentieth century: Pound, Eliot, H.D., Williams. Mulhern writes, and writes well, the free verse I mentioned earlier as the dominant mode today. The line holds from three to six beats and usually breaks at a major syntactic division in the sentence, often letting the break augment or even take the place of punctuation. Mulhern, though, is fond of breaking slightly off the breath pause to speed up the rhythm of her poems. From the early free verse masters she has also absorbed a love of the image that dominates her work. Some poems, like "Winter," are such well-done, pure imagism that it is easy to imagine Amy Lowell or the young Ezra Pound delighting in them. In others, Mulhern's gift for condensed imagery can lead to a certain word-drunkenness of concision that suggests some of the excesses of the early part of the century. Describing a crocodile as "imbued in a bitter thanatoidal slime" reminds me of Hart Crane when his rhetoric misfires.

But Mulhern, who like Schoenberger has a fine ear for assonance, is always a graceful writer; and when the imagery and associative leaps combine with urgency of expression the results are

[5] PARALLAX, by *Maureen Mulhern*. Wesleyan University Press. $17.00; $8.95.

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nothing less than superb: "Parallax," "Under a Tundra, the Desert, the Sea," "Die Forelle," and "Candelia." But my favorite poem in the book is "Skating," the associative and imagistic *tour de force* that opens the book. As a child skating on Sinoway's pond, the speaker imagined

> crayfish in hibernation,
> Their pewter spines curled in frozen viscous
>
> Sacs and bubbles while hockey pucks
> Sent shadows over them like tiny spheres
>
> Whizzing out of orbit.

When she stumbles, she feels it's because she is "pulled by a mottled glow / Of fish below the ice, their opaque, / Greenish skin as fine as rice paper, mouths / Stuck in perpetual loops." The memories, however, aren't all so beguiling, and the poem shifts radically at the end:

> But the winter
> Was an Appaloosa, bruised white and grey,
>
> Its mane, cream turning pale against the sky.
> At night, I dreamed of clear, red planets
>
> Eclipsing thinner disks, shifting
> Like ocular cells on all sides; featureless
>
> Faces bobbed for eye space while I clung
> To the basket of a hot-air balloon
>
> And felt the world obliquely tip away, sliding
> Further and further to where I am now.

The giddy rush of the ending as the poem shifts abruptly from past to present is unexpected, breathtaking, delightful, and not a little scary.

Whatever reservations you may have about Sharon Olds's poetry—and I have a number—there's no denying that she's a lot of fun to read.[6] The poems always open with a great "hook" to grab the reader and the endings are even better—kickers, stunners. But the movement between the opening and the conclusion is usually a headlong rush in which one line collapses into another because the poem is in such a hurry to get to its payoff. The piling up of weak

[6] THE GOLD CELL, by *Sharon Olds*. Alfred A. Knopf. $8.95p.

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words, especially articles and conjunctions, at the end of a line can create a pell-mell, head-over-heels tumble but it can also, when overdone, cause the line as a unit to lose its integrity:

> And I called the
> hospital, I remember kneeling by the
> phone on the third-floor landing of the dorm, the
> dark steep stairs down
> next to me. . . .

The result is a narrative held together not by measure or rhythm but by the facts of the story and the intensity of their expression—the same things that hold us transfixed when a friend tells a wrenching story about his or her life. But I wonder about how these poems will hold up to repeated reading. The same emotional propulsion that makes the poems so hypnotically readable also causes some sentimentality, when the emotion veers out of proportion to the situation it arises from; sensationalism ("The Pope's Penis"); and simple silliness ("Mouse Elegy," "Gerbil Funeral"; and consider too the opening of "Alcatraz": "When I was a girl, I knew I was a man / because they might send me to Alcatraz / and only men went to Alcatraz").

Olds very deliberately puts herself in the tradition of Plath and Sexton, and that may be a mistake. Her poems lack the wild, yet nimble, associative leaps that make Plath's poems so dazzling and the deeply-felt spiritual yearning that unites Sexton's body of work. If Plath identifies her father with Hitler, Olds in "History: 13" takes second best among the three Axis leaders and identifies her father with Mussolini. The father comes home one night with blood on his face and lies down

> on the couch, his arms
> up, like Mussolini hanging
> upside down in the air, his head
> dangling where they could reach him with boards
> and their
> fingernails, those who had lived
> under his tyranny.

In concluding, the poem directly evokes Plath's "Daddy":

> I turned my back
> on happiness, at 13 I entered
> a life of mourning, of mourning for the Fascist.

The obvious next question is, "How well does this poem stand up next to Plath's?" Not very well, I think. Perhaps Olds is a writer of

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poems more than she is a writer of books of poems. If I pick up the book and read three poems, I'm knocked out by at least one of them, by the sheer power of individual utterance. But reading the book as a whole I begin to worry about the Freudian or Jungian or self-revealing "punch lines" that suddenly snap at the end of too many poems. The move begins to seem more like a reflex than a vision.

But, for all these reservations, I don't want to scant the power of these poems, especially those in the first section when Olds writes in the third person or employs a persona—techniques that allow her more distance from her subjects. And in the final section there are some very touching poems about her children: "The Moment the Two Worlds Meet," "The Signs," and "Looking at Them Asleep," which ends: "When love comes to me and says / What do you know, I say This girl, this boy."

William Matthews is a poet we may not value as much as we should because, too often, we don't take wit and humor as seriously as we should. The majority of the poems in Matthews' *Foreseeable Futures* are fifteen-line poems, made up of five, three-line stanzas, with the lines mostly in rough hexameters.[7] But when he wants to, or when the subjects demand, Matthews shifts smoothly to pentameter or tetrameter. Though the fifteen-line poems might bring to mind the sonnet form, to me the poems evoke John Berryman's *Dream Songs*, just because Matthews is our wittiest, funniest serious poet since Berryman. But Matthews is more reflective, calmer, more sane than Berryman. Unlike some sharp wit that assaults the reader or shuts him out, Matthews' wit opens the poem to us, includes us in the good laughter. It's the product of a deeply playful and serious intelligence that acknowledges the failings of the world and is still generous with it—and with us. Here, in a deft tetrameter line, is "Photo of the Author with a Favorite Pig":

> Behind its snout like a huge button,
> like an almost clean plate, the pig
> looks candid compared to the author,
>
> and why not?

That last line break is absolutely delicious—the line break as comic timing. The way the break shifts the rhythm and sets up the punch line of "and why not" is as adroit as a Jack Benny pause. But it's not just a punch line. It also sets up the next movement of the poem:

> He has a way with words,
> but the unspeakable pig, squat

[7] FORESEEABLE FUTURES, by *William Matthews*. Houghton Mifflin. $13.95; $8.95.

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and foresquare as a bathtub

squats frankly.

The shift to a three-beat line while discussing the compactness of the pig is effective because it doesn't call undue attention to itself. And as the poem uncoils we see it is a musing on the nature of the artist, who talks, and his relation to the *ding an sich*—in this case a pig—which has the appearance of wisdom because of its very muteness:

The author is skinny and looks serious:
what will he say next? The copious pig

has every appearance of knowing
from his pert, coiled tail to the wispy tips
of his edible ears, but the pig isn't telling.

In other poems the balance between humor and seriousness shifts more toward the latter. Among the many superb poems in the book, I especially admire "Fellow Oddballs," "Cabbage," "Days Beyond Recall," "Minuscule Things," "Attention Shoppers," "Puberty," and "Vasectomy."

A different sort of mastery of the line shows up in "The Accompanist," in which a jazz musician speaks. The line here begins with a three- and four-beat line that frequently breaks against the breath pause and is rarely end-stopped, conveying subtly and without insistence the music it is talking about. Probably the best way to end a look at the way some contemporary poets use the line is by watching, in action, someone who writes the line with real mastery. Expanding occasionally to five beats to match the expansion of its theme, "The Accompanist" offers this moving *ars poetica*:

Remember "Reckless
Blues"? Bessie Smith sings out "Daddy"
and Louis Armstrong plays back "Daddy"
as clear through his horn as if he'd
spoken it. But it's her daddy and her
story. When you play it you become
your part in it, one of her beautiful
troubles, and then, however much music
can do this, part of her consolation,
the way pain and joy eat off each other's
plates, but mostly you play to drunks,
to the night, to the way you judge
and pardon yourself, to all that goes
not unsung, but unrecorded.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ELIZABETH KNIES has been living and teaching in Kobe, Japan since the fall of 1985. Her publications include two books of poems, *Streets After Rain* (Alicejamesbooks) and *From the Window* (Teal Press). . . . GARY KRIST, a native-born New Jerseyite, now lives in Brooklyn. His story in this issue is part of his collection called *The Garden State*, to be published in 1988 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. . . . KATE JENNINGS lives in Geneva, Switzerland. Her poems have been published in various anthologies. . . . DANA GIOIA is preparing a collection of his literary essays to be titled *Business and Poetry* for publication by Graywolf Press. . . . HERBERT LOMAS's most recent book of poetry was *Letters in the Dark*, published by Oxford University Press in 1986. He has just completed translating and editing an anthology of twenty-one Finnish poets. . . . NEAL BOWERS,* a professor at Iowa State University, is currently editor of *Poet and Critic*. . . . MICHAEL KELLOGG* is Assistant to the Solicitor General, United States Department of Justice. . . . JOHN HAINES's most recent book is called *Stories We Listened To*, published by The Bench Press. . . . JAYANTA MAHAPATRA's *Selected Poems* has just been published by Oxford University Press, New Delhi. Also just published is his *Orissa* (Lustre Press), a pictorial celebration of his native city. . . . TRENT BUSCH* teaches at Valdosta State College in Georgia.

JEROME MAZZARO's most recent books are *The Caves of Love* (Jazz Press, 1985) and *Rubbings* (Quiet Hills Press, 1985). He lives in Buffalo and teaches at the State University there. . . . BRUCE BAWER,* a literary critic, was a 1986 nominee for the National Book Critics Circle Reviewer's Citation. . . . GEOFFREY GARDNER* is editor and publisher of *The Ark*. In 1986 Tamarack Press brought out a collection of his translations of the poetry of Jules Supervielle as *The Horses of Time*. . . . MARCIA B. SIEGEL's biography of Doris Humphrey, *Days on Earth*, will be published in January by Yale University Press. . . . BERT CARDULLO is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Richmond, Virginia, where he teaches film and modern drama. . . . RICHARD HORNBY is spending the academic year as Visiting Professor at Nanjing University, People's Republic of China. . . . C. B. COX has just been elected Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester in England. . . . GEORGE KEARNS is completing a book on Pound's *Cantos* to be published by Cambridge University Press in 1988. . . . HARRY GOLDGAR is a lawyer in New Orleans. A former professor of English and comparative literature, he has been book editor at the Nashville *Tennessean*. . . . In 1988 Houghton Mifflin will bring out ANDREW HUDGINS' *After the Lost War: A Narrative*. . . . DICK ALLEN's collection of poems, *Flight and Pursuit*, has just been published by LSU Press.

* *Asterisk indicates a new contributor.*

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25	**Irina Ratushinskaya** and **Adam Zagajewski**	$8
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IN THIS ISSUE:

Ultimately the mission of the university has little to do with the mission of the arts, and this long cohabitation has had an enervating effect on all the arts but especially on poetry and music. With the best of intentions the university has intellectualized the arts to a point where they have been cut off from the vulgar vitality of popular traditions and, as a result, their public has shrunk to groups of academic specialists and a captive audience of students, both of which refer to everything beyond the university as "the real world." Mainly poets read contemporary poetry, and only professional musicians and composers attend concerts of new music.

—Dana Gioia, "Notes on the New Formalism," p. 395.

Dour heads on television warn that in our own immense way we are following Britain toward an age of humbled decline. May it be genteel, so gradual that we hardly notice, on any particular morning, what we can no longer afford. Meanwhile, there remains, at every point of the compass, the expensive, untidy, dangerous heritage of Western imperialism, which we can neither wind up nor wind down. Such is the potential for drama in memories of the colonial scene and in its aftermath . . .

—George Kearns, "Post-Colonial Fiction," p. 487.

Teddy Roosevelt dismissed Henry James as "an effete and miserable snob." HJ returned the compliment by classifying his distinguished contemporary as a "dangerous jingo." The superficial insight and profound injustice of both views should surprise no one. The two men were bound to misunderstand one another, just as Sarah Pocock and Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors* had no common ground on which to meet.

—Michael Kellogg, "The Squirrel's Heartbeat," p. 432.

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